People, place, and politics: Everyday-life in post-tsunami coastal Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This thesis emerges from a critical event; the Asian tsunami of 26th December 2004. It takes an analytical approach to narratives of everyday life events in two coastal communities in southern Sri Lanka. The villages of Po and Thomale, were both severely affected by the tsunami. They received varied and contrasting outside attention and aid in the aftermath of the disaster as a consequence of their different geographic and social characteristics. The thesis draws on my extended contact with these two communities over almost a decade, in the beginning as an aid worker, and later as a field-researcher. This extended contact has enabled me to explore the transformations in social and spatial organisation in the two communities, from the immediate aftermath of the tsunami up to the present day. Whilst Po benefited from numerous projects, aid, and development, as a result of its tourism and capital-generating potential, the fishing village of Thomale was largely side-lined. The characteristics of Po, and the changes that took place post-tsunami, promoted 'outsider' driven development and the appropriation of local land, by both foreign and Sinhalese entrepreneurs. The thesis answers two key questions: a) what strategies have locals developed to counteract this uninvited intrusion into their community? And b) how have the events and developments that have transpired as a result of the tsunami, affected locals' 'sense of place' and their social relations?

In tackling these questions, I explore local interpretations of kin and community, the role of kin-based factions, and the subsequent reconfiguration of a sense of place around novel kin-based social networks. Narratives of place are also explored, and in this context the thesis outlines how ritual is utilised to voice individual and communal concerns over the changing face and politics of place, as well as exploring violent conflicts that arise as a result of seemingly misplaced power relations, and identity. Ultimately, this thesis presents a segment of an on-going narrative of the relationship between people, politics and place in the aftermath of a disaster.

People, place, and politics

Everyday-life in post-tsunami coastal Sri Lanka

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Thirty years of tsunamis

On 26th December 2004 a magnitude 9.0 earthquake off the west coast of Sumatra generated tsunami waves that decimated most of the Sri Lankan coastline, as well as the coastlines of other nearby countries. Over 35,000 people were killed and over half a million were displaced in Sri Lanka alone (Frerks and Klem 2005). In Matara district a total of 1,088 persons were killed and 29,550 displaced (Ruhunu University 2005). The coastal villages of Po and Thomale are the focus of this thesis and were among the worst affected communities in the whole of Matara district. The villages are three kilometres apart and a few kilometres from Matara town. The town is located 156 kilometres from the capital Colombo and is a rapidly developing commercial hub. The crocodile infested *Nilwala Ganga* (river) runs through the town and is a source of irrigation water for tea, rubber, cardamom, cinnamon, and paddy cultivation in the area.

In December 2005, almost a year after the tsunami struck, I was walking along a beach in Matara in the south of Sri Lanka accompanied by a local friend. He was showing me the damaged houses and what remained of his fishing village following the tsunami. As we sat on a pile of bricks he turned to me and said, 'we have had tsunami here for thirty years, but only now foreigners come'. His statement stuck with me ever since and, in part, it was what led to subsequent fieldwork. My friend continued by detailing the floods they had had in the area over the years. The town of Matara and the localities surrounding it are subject to frequent and destructive flooding, and occasional landslides and cyclones (Matara municipal council). In 2003 floods affected 43,750 people in the district and in 2008 more floods affected 1,972 people and damaged 437 houses (Matara municipal council). Most people living in the district have to cope with frequent natural hazards. My friend went on to describe the conflict between the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the JVP insurrections (1971; 1987 – 1989) all of which had caused disruption and claimed many lives. Yet, the flow of aid into Sri Lanka following the tsunami was unparalleled in the recent history of the island. The 2004 tsunami was also the first natural hazard to invite a wave of foreign response and investment. After telling me about the long list of conflicts and disasters that local people had faced over the years, he shrugged his shoulders and commented that he would have to do a great deal of pleading before he saw any aid directed his way. His statement that his community had been experiencing 'tsunami for thirty years' suggested that the present catastrophe was just another in a string of calamities and they would cope as they had

always coped. This thesis is about people's everyday capacity to cope in the aftermath of a disaster; it is about ordinary lives and the politics of place.

I had arrived in Sri Lanka in November 2005, less than a year after the tsunami. I was there as an NGO/aid worker coordinating post-tsunami projects in villages in the vicinity of Matara town until November 2006. I had been shocked by the images I had seen, on the news back home in Malta, of the destruction caused by the tsunami, so when the opportunity presented itself I was able to join a Maltese NGO working in Sri Lanka. I was placed in charge of setting up a fishing co-operative in Matara town, as well as teaching English in a number of villages in the area. I was twenty-one and was expected to show people who had never met me how to rebuild their lives. Plunged into a society I knew little about and a climate I was not used to, the idea that I could tell people how best to live in their environment was ludicrous. As I settled into the area and was befriended by locals it became clear that the aid projects being carried out were not necessarily benefiting the people they were meant to. Setting up a fishing co-operative implied: gathering fishermen selected by the NGO's local intermediary, donating boats, engines and fishing equipment, and dividing the fishermen up into groups of three to a boat. The fishermen would share a boat between each group, and the catch from each vessel would be shared between all fishermen in the co-operative. The fishermen were not happy. They had each lost a boat, and now they had to share a boat with two other men whom they did not necessarily know or were friendly with, whilst people who had lost nothing and were not fishermen before the tsunami received boats from other NGOs. When I informed the NGO head about these issues she said, 'they will have to do as we say. You can't believe everything they say anyway. They lie and they are greedy, it's a problem of their culture. Remember they are poor and desperate'.

I soon found that the NGO head's attitude was similar to that of other NGO personnel, in that they depicted beneficiaries as vulnerable victims. In this context, beneficiaries were denied agency and were presumed to be dependent on the help and support of the affluent foreign organisations that the tsunami had brought in its wake.

The ethnographic fieldwork that I ultimately went on to carry out shows that despite being portrayed by outsiders as vulnerable, weak and lacking agency, locals did take control of their lives in all sorts of ways. The people with who I worked took stock of the changes brought about by the tsunami and set about their own processes of adjustment and reconstruction. Through their knowledge of the area, locals were often able to turn adversity to their advantage. Despite my initial experience of communities being portrayed as vulnerable by NGOs, long term field work reveals a

capacity for resilience and adaptation. As Edward Simpson states, speaking of the earthquake which destroyed large parts of Gujarat in 2001:

> When we focus on how ordinary people understood the catastrophe and the aftermath, whom they blamed and cursed, how they perceived the interventions of the government, and how they went about restoring passable conditions in which they could live out their own lives, then the story of the disaster has a different feel and logic (Simpson 2013: 2).

This thesis is a story of the aftermath of a disaster that contrasts two small and quite different communities and offers insights into the effects of outside interventions on these communities. It provides an ethnographic account of various moments in the everyday lives of people in these two coastal communities. By 'everyday' I am here referring to actions and events considered to be routine processes, but that reflect wider operational orientations of a group or community (De Certeau 1984). I establish a contrast with the extraordinary to bring attention to routine, order, control and the unexceptional reproduction of social reality. By drawing attention to the latter I demonstrate the extent to which the disaster has been 'woven into the fabric of everyday life' (Chatterji and Mehta 2007: 1). Routine and normalcy are thus subsumed under the heading of everyday life (Lefebvre 1961; De Certeau 1984; Chatterji and Mehta 2007; Simpson 2013). Following a calamity it is the everyday actions and events that allow us to observe how far the effects of the calamity have intruded into and become a part of routine life. The narratives, interpretations and analyses provided in this thesis were made possible through close interactions with its main protagonists spread out at different times over almost a decade.

Outline of the problem

This thesis is concerned with the relationship between people and place in coastal southern Sri Lanka. The thesis draws on my extended contact with two coastal communities in the Matara district, Po and Thomale, over almost a decade.[1] My initial contact with the communities was as an aid worker and later as a field-researcher.[2] This extended contact has enabled me to explore the

[1] Throughout this thesis all names of localities (with the exception of Matara and other major towns) and their inhabitants have been changed at the request of participants. I have chosen not to change the name of Matara town, and the participants I asked provided no objection. To readers familiar with this part of Sri Lanka, descriptions of characteristics unique to the town make it immediately identifiable. However, there are numerous small villages along the coast and rivers that allow me to mask my field sites to some extent.

[2] From November 2005 – November 2006 I was based in Matara district working with NGOs and co-ordinating various relief projects in the area. In April 2008 I returned for six months of fieldwork in Po and another fishing village for my MA by research in Anthropology. From February to April 2010 I returned for a visit and to carry

transformations in social and spatial organisation in the two communities, from the immediate aftermath of the tsunami up to the present day. Since my first arrival in Sri Lanka in 2005 till the present day, I have retained ongoing and close relationships with many locals in the area, and these relationships emerged out of, what I have interpreted as, a mutual interest from both myself and locals in the changes taking place following the disaster. A principal finding to arise out of my long-term immersion is that for Po, the changes that took place post-tsunami promoted outsider driven development and the appropriation of local land by both foreign and Sinhalese entrepreneurs. By contrast, the situation in Thomale was much as the fisherman I referred to above had suggested; aid and outside attention would not be coming to them. In the light of this finding the thesis sets out to answer two key questions: a) what were the everyday responses of locals to these two very different outside responses to the calamities they faced? And b) how did post- tsunami reconstruction strategies affect people's sense of place and the way they form social relations in such places?

My long term engagement with the area around Matara is fundamental to the account of post-tsunami life that I develop in this thesis. For this reason, I dedicate considerable space in chapter 2 to an overview of my assimilation into the Matara District. I describe the key protagonists in village life and how I came to meet them. In this chapter I situate myself in the narratives of disaster and reconstruction that were told to me over the years. Ethnographies have over the decades tended to include more and more of the perceptions and personal experiences of the ethnographer (Smith-Bowen 1954; Rabinow 1977; Pratt 1986; Simpson 2006; Crapanzano 2010; Hastrup 2010). Specifically, the accounts of my experiences in this thesis provide examples of how little control I sometimes had over the direction my fieldwork took (Simpson 2006). They also serve to provide a contrast of my own interpretation of people and place, juxtaposed against locals' relationship to and experience of place. How does place and specific experiences of place affect one's relationship to it? My fieldwork was conducted between two coastal villages and I commuted by bicycle between the two sites for the duration of my stay. These commutes were a central aspect of my research methodology. My regular bike commutes allowed me to familiarise myself with many of the geographic and environmental features of the villages, and to also meet people and become acquainted with their daily routines. As a result, locals also familiarised themselves with me. The friendly relations I built with my informants were not without problems, and I detail some of the main issues I encountered, in particular, the use of deception as a narrative and discursive tool.

Chapter 3 sets the scene for a more detailed exploration of the challenges that the tsunami created for coastal communities. I argue in this chapter that the most significant part of a disaster event is

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out some research in the North of the country. My doctoral fieldwork lasted from January 2012 till July 2013, with a break in-between from January to early March 2013 as a result of visa issues.

the aftermath. In particular, the greatest concern for those affected by the tsunami was the issue of land ownership and land use. The destruction of property and reorganisation of land-ownership as a result of the tsunami was further complicated by the imposition of a 100 metre no-build buffer-zone by the GoSL. Matters were made worse by alleged discrimination in the allocation of funds for the rebuilding of destroyed homes. I indicate in chapters 3 and 4, that aid in many cases was disbursed following the establishment of patron-client relations between the donors and the beneficiaries. These arrangements left beneficiaries in a vulnerable position as they felt dependent on outsiders for the receipt of aid. Post-tsunami policies, projects and initiatives are shown to have favoured the development of the tourist industry over the reconstruction of tsunami affected communities. This unevenness in NGO and government response led to fundamental changes in the political and social organisation of these communities.

In chapter 4 I review the key literature on kinship and land tenure in Sri Lanka, for what it tells us about kinship in other parts of Sri Lanka over different periods of time. The tsunami represented a critical moment of change for many communities along the Sri Lankan coastline, both in terms of its immediate physical effects, as well as the policies and outsider-driven interventions that characterised the aftermath. In particular, chapter 4 explores the ways in which locals, in both Po and Thomale, form and maintain social relationships. How do locals express kinship? To answer this question, I provide examples of interactions between family members, and the different obligations that are understood to organise and drive family relations. I argue that locals utilise kin idioms to describe desired, and perceived, relations with other locals who are not their family members. I demonstrate the importance of socially constructed kinship relations with reference to Thomale group [*kattiya*] formation. Through the establishment of a co-operative system of sharing employment on a limited number of fishing boats, fishermen solidify kin relations with other fishermen. The survival and continuation of this co-operative system in the aftermath of the tsunami, I argue, is what allowed fishing families to cope with and overcome the effects of the disaster. I dedicate considerable space to a discussion of the organisation of family relations in Po, and the organisation of groups competing for land earmarked for development of the local tourist industry. I also provide case studies regarding new friendships and partnerships with foreign expatriates in the village. The increased availability of coastal land in Po has led to increased relations with outsiders, where some of these relations also adopt the character of kinship.

An analysis of local kinship reveals much about the characteristics of social relations between individuals and within groups, in these two settings. In chapter 5 I expand the platform of my discussion to explore the ways in which people relate to their surroundings. How are social

relationships, individual identity, and group identity characterised by place, and vice versa? To illustrate these themes, I present examples of conflicts between individuals, as well as between intra-village groups, where local notions of territoriality emerge. In these conflicts, rights to village space are challenged by outside groups, and in the narratives of the conflicts the narrators reveal individual and group perceptions of themselves. I draw attention to the everyday activities that define certain places within each village. These places, the fish market in Thomale and the main beach in Po, are regarded by many locals as the epicentres of village life, where local livelihoods are concentrated. I also present a case study involving a tsunami warning in April 2012, where painful memories of the 2004 tsunami are re-awakened. Throughout the course of that day in April, I talked to different individuals who gave details of the 2004 tsunami, others voiced their fears, and others contemplated their past actions. I ask, what conflicts emerge as a result of the varied outsider driven investments in each locality post-tsunami? Central to this discussion is how outsiders became integrated into these communities, a point touched upon in chapter 4, and which I expand on in this chapter by providing local narratives of their categorisation of foreigners.

The tsunami and its effects are a key feature of the first two chapters of this thesis. However, as the thesis progresses, the tsunami is mentioned less and the focus turns to the everyday. The sense of an event fading into the past is intentional. The thesis begins with the tsunami as a major event that profoundly affected the communities I worked with but, over time, a sense of normalcy is established and life continues. The structure of the thesis thus reflects the process of adjustment in the aftermath of a disaster, where disorder and uncertainty slowly fade away into memory. The tsunami is mentioned less but it still looms in the background. Although things are never the same after such a calamitous event, life continues and the rhythm of the everyday sways to a different tune.

The later chapters of the thesis are my attempts to listen to and make sense of this tune. In chapters 4 and 5 I have analysed social relations as I observed them, and I have bridged my observations of everyday life with locals' own accounts and narratives of everyday events. The increased presence of foreign expats and tourists in Po and the purchase of large swathes of local coastal land, have probably been the most contentious issues for locals in the aftermath of the tsunami. In chapter 6 I take a closer look at local perceptions of foreigners and foreigners' perceptions of locals. What factors account for the increase in foreign expats living in village coastal Sri Lanka? How do foreigners interact with and view locals? I take as my examples case studies of foreign expat interactions with locals in both Po and Thomale. Although Thomale was side-lined from receiving aid and is not considered to be an ideal place for foreigners to live in, I present a case study of local

interactions and conflicts with the only foreign couple living in the village. The case studies presented in this chapter demonstrate that exoticization of the Other is never unidirectional, thus both foreigners and locals exoticize and are in turn exoticized. The perceptions that each group have of the other is illustrative of tensions between foreigners and locals, that marked the immediate aftermath of the tsunami.

Community in this context is characterised by the interactions between people and place, and the political motivations that bind them. In other words community is a sense of belonging together. Collective memory and place-based knowledge, in this context, are taken by locals as markers of the embedded-ness of an individual in a community. Chapter 7 explores the relationship between people and place through an excursion into the world of ghosts and the spirits of the dead [*prēta*]. I illustrate how rituals intended to appease land spirits [*bahiravā puja*] bind a family to a piece of land and in the process evoke a narrative of community through collective memory. The *bahiravā puja* is a ritual to appease *prēta* and drive them from the land. During these rituals men collect together, drink, and share stories of sightings of *prēta*. They draw on their collective memory of the deceased to reminisce and cope with loss. Locals also acknowledge that the *prēta* were once members of their community. Outsiders living in the village who have not integrated into the community do not have the *puja* performed for them. Locals thus believe that the foreign owned land is still inhabited by *prēta*, and as a result the land never really belongs to the outsiders, but still belongs to the *prēta*. Thus, narratives of *prēta* evoke rituals of community. Through the gathering of people at this ritual, the boundaries between insiders and outsiders are exposed.

In chapter 8 I illustrate how the violated body is utilised to express social alienation and loss of power and authority. I provide a case study of an exorcism/ devil-dance [*thovil*] in Thomale to illustrate how the social alienation of a local man led him to drink excessively, making him unable to function in normal social situations, and resulting in his further alienation. A *thovil* was required and I argue that the gathering of friends and kin to the event restores the individual's sense of self. People gather for his *thovil* and in the process demonstrate that he is able to draw friends and well-wishers to his aid. The *thovil* is shown to function as a ritual for social inclusion and re-confirms the bonds of friendship and kinship that the individual felt he had lost, through the gathering of kin to the event. In the second part of the chapter I utilise a case study of self-harm in Po. A man, Sunil's, loss of power and control over his wife and domestic situation leads him to swallow agrochemicals in a bid to shame her, and direct attention from himself onto his wife. His wife's social status is linked to the status of her husband and his immediate kin. Suicide imbues the victim's family with shame. Thus, acts of suicide or self-harm direct family members' attention to the victim and communicate a

grievance. Although extreme as a method of communication, the act of self-harm in this case convinces his wife of his intent and she relaxes her control over him as a result.

The utilisation of the body and its violation as a form of communication is not a new phenomenon. Similar cases that reflect the relationship between shame, power, and status in Sri Lanka have been widely recorded (Spencer 1990a; Stirrat 1992; Gamburd 2000; Marecek 2006; Widger 2009). The case studies in chapter 8 represent aspects of everyday life in two Sri Lankan coastal communities. These case studies expose the character of social relationships and local understandings of life and death, as well as status and community. They also reveal and allow us to understand local actions in the aftermath of the disaster. How do some locals cope with situations of vulnerability, sadness and marginalisation? The documentation of everyday life may sometimes reveal local attitudes for coping with crisis, where these attitudes reflect transformations at the village level.

Chapter 2 - 'Doing the field': Everyday life and the challenge of fieldwork

My fieldwork was conducted in an area I have been familiar with and with people I have known for almost a decade. I spent a year between 2005 and 2006 as an NGO/aid worker in the south of the island, six months in 2008 conducting fieldwork for my Masters degree in Anthropology, six weeks in 2010 split between a visit and work on a project, and sixteen months in 2012 and 2013 on doctoral research. The coastal region of southern Sri Lanka is in many respects, a site that might be considered 'exotic' both aesthetically and socially.

This thesis records my changing role and status with the people in the aftermath of the tsunami. It describes developments over the years with regards to relationships with people, and places. With this in mind, this chapter provides a reflexive account (Caplan 1988; Geertz 1988; Rabinow 1977; Nordstrom 2004) of the area and the people and how I came to know them.

Edward Bruner has commented on the impossibility of separating experience from the production of ethnography and social history. He states: 'Retellings never cease; there is an infinite reflexivity as we go from experience to discourse to history. Eventually, all experience is filtered out and we end where we began – with the story' (Bruner 1986: 148). Fieldwork and the engagement with significant others, that is, our informants, requires no small degree of emotional investment. Doing conventional immersive fieldwork is to experience intense feelings of attachment, sympathy, and empathy at one end of the spectrum and rage, solitude and at times despair at the other end. The latter is brought out clearly in Rabinow's description of his conflict and irritation with Malik, one of his key informants. Speaking of his relationship with Malik he says: 'I must have been deceiving myself; a vast gulf lay between us and could never be bridged. I felt on the edge of an abyss and had a rush of vertigo' (Rabinow 1977: 114). Similarly, Bob Simpson comments on the irritation he felt at the lack of control he had over the development of his fieldwork. He draws a contrast between 'doing fieldwork' and 'being done' by the field. Speaking of his main informant he opines that:

> In truth, I still feel a frisson of anger as I recall the occasions when I was blocked and outwitted in my attempts to shape my fieldwork according to the plans that I had rather than those that suited his purposes (Simpson 2006: 129).

On returning from the field, we set about writing up our data, and begin the task of separating ourselves from the emotional rollercoaster that was the fieldwork experience. As the separation grows we begin to compact, categorise and analyse our observations, and stitch them into a

structured patchwork of ethnographic narrative and theory. Personal narratives may bridge this gap; they, like the ethnographer, represent a liminal plane between two polarised points, neither in nor out, a transitory product of experience near and experience far, the muddled binding of the emic with the etic. My use of personal narratives serves here to develop analysis, and question my informants' narratives based on my own viewing of the way events transpired. Through the use of my own experiences I am not attempting to highlight a 'crisis of representation' (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 8), to do so would be beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I emphasise the benefits that come out of lengthy immersion in a place. Mary Louise Pratt in her contribution to *Writing Culture* highlights the tension between writing and fieldwork by stating:

> Personal narrative mediates this contradiction between the engagement called for in fieldwork and the self-effacement called for in formal ethnographic description, or at least mitigates some of its anguish, by inserting into the ethnographic text the authority of the personal experience out of which the ethnography is made (Pratt 1986: 33).

The history of my own protracted engagement with the communities I have worked in over many years and my varied role within them, requires me to attempt to make sense of these experiences and how they have affected my field methodologies, my approach to engagement, to define the development of my relationships and to justify or venture some explanation for my somewhat privileged access to information, or the lack of it. In this chapter in particular, my personal narratives enable both me and the readers to get their bearings and trace a passage through my experience of people in these places over time.

Arrival in the wake of a disaster – enduring perceptions

I first arrived in Sri Lanka in early November 2005, having just completed my undergraduate degree in Anthropology. Since reading news reports of the Asian tsunami of 26th December 2004, I had been applying to work as a volunteer in Sri Lanka, with any NGO that would be willing to take me. I had been compelled to join an NGO by the images of the disaster I had seen in the media and a desire to be of help. Joining an NGO seemed the like the best way to do this. Finally, and after a number of unsuccessful attempts, I was contacted in July 2005 by a local Maltese NGO and offered the possibility to go to Sri Lanka on a volunteer basis to teach English and to help set up a fishing co-operative in the tsunami-hit town of Matara in southern Sri Lanka. This was highly appropriate since my undergrad thesis and fieldwork had dealt with risk in Malta's only fishing co-operative. It was

agreed with the NGO head that I would stay for two months, although this was then extended to four months and finally to a year. I had spent the previous three years submerged in ethnographic literature and I was itching to get into the field and actually carry out some real anthropological fieldwork.

When I arrived in Sri Lanka it had been ten months since the tsunami and, on the five hour journey from Colombo to Matara, the effects of the disaster were still clearly visible. There was a single road that ran parallel along the coast and, as we left the chaos and traffic of Colombo behind us, the road became constricted into a tight, two-laned stretch of pock-marked tarmac. Vehicles swerved past each other at blinding speed, dodging slow moving cows, indignant locals and erratically driven motorbikes. Our driver stamped down viciously on the accelerator, moving his glance to the scenery and occasionally looking to the road just in time to avoid oncoming vehicles. Colourful buses sped by in both directions constantly sounding their horns. They seemed to balance uneasily on the narrow road. It was impossible to catch glimpses of the drivers but the buses themselves seemed furious as they careered and swerved down the road, avoiding vehicles, and the discarded food items and road-kill that seemed to pepper this single stretch of teeming tarmac.

Despite the beauty of the coastal area and the greener patches adjoining it, the destruction of the wave was still clearly discernible. Later on this was made more evident in the fishing area of Matara fort [*kotuwa*] which had been heavily inundated. The experience of Matara at that time had prompted me to write an article for a Maltese magazine in early 2006, where I described the scene in the following way:

> Behind the wall of coconut palms lies a long stretch of skeletal abodes, the walls, interiors and many of the occupants washed away in one swift sweep as was the dignity of those who survived the ordeal and are still forced to live in shacks of corrugated metal and rotting wood, sharing a two man boat between eight. Their eyes, reddened by too much sun and sea salt, a distant gaze, a search for solace long gone, as they attempt without much success to pick up the traces of a past life strewn across a heavily scarred stretch of land. Memories loom like specters behind every hanging brick and salt spackled concrete blocks - the clothes of loved ones still dangling from every conceivable nook as if waiting for their owners to come and reclaim them. A sentiment which seems to be widely shared, is the resignation weighing every step, every trudge, every stumble into this stretch of unexplainable turmoil embodied in the locals' gaze, forgotten by the outside world (Said 2006).

As Hastrup notes: 'the defamiliarising strategy that fieldwork entails cuts the ethnographer loose from familiar neighbourhoods and landscapes and gives access to a different sense of place –

highlighting a relationship beyond words but within feelings' (Hastrup 2010: 193). In this thesis, part of what I attempt to illustrate is how the communities affected by the tsunami have changed since my first encounter with them shortly after the disaster struck and, in so doing, how my relationship with them has changed over the ensuing years. The power of my first images of coastal Sri Lankan communities shaped my initial perceptions. Working with an NGO in a post-disaster scenario made me aware of the vast gulf that existed between Western aid workers and locals. Whether intentionally or not, foreign workers I spoke to at the time portrayed themselves as superior to locals, whom they depicted as vulnerable and uncivilized. When I returned for fieldwork in 2012 I noticed a similar attitude between some expats who had built luxury homes on the coast and the villagers in their locality. I was reminded again of the power relations I had noted on my first trip to the island. Vincent Crapanzano has said that,

> At first, at least in exotic sites, the weight is on the unfamiliar, but with time the unfamiliar becomes familiar. *And* from an anthropological perspective, this familiarity, as necessary as it is ethnographically, is not without its dangers, ethnographically, for we risk losing track of what was once salient (Crapanzano 2010: 72).

During my first stay in Matara in 2005 and 2006, I was working with two separate communities of fishermen who had been affected by the tsunami. Many of the fishermen had lost numerous family members, homes and their fishing boats during the tsunami. My role within the NGO was to identify who had been affected, find out what they had lost, and then approach them about forming a fishing co-operative. Once formed the co-operative would be given boats, engines and fishing nets. In return, the fishermen would contribute a small amount of their catch every month in partial payment of the aid given. What I did not know in my early days working in these communities was that in the first six months following the tsunami there had been a rush by numerous NGOs, government representatives and benevolent individuals to donate, seemingly, as much as possible as quickly as possible (see Stirrat 2006). Many Sri Lankans in the Matara area benefitted from the aid being disbursed, although it has also been noted that many of those claiming aid had lost nothing in the tsunami (Gamburd 2014). Those that had survived the full onslaught of the destructive power of the tsunami waves, relinquishing their homes and peace of mind in the process, had been shifted to tsunami and IDP (internally displaced person) camps scattered inland, away from the coast, and thus, were also separated from their livelihoods and protective kin networks. Apart from the trauma suffered, most of those affected had very little proficiency in English and, unable to approach the hordes of Western NGOs and their representatives, had been side-lined by other locals descending on the area with considerably more fluency in English, and thus, an ability to approach the organisations with their various pleas for aid. As a result, there were stories circulating of locals that

had received numerous boats from different organisations, so that many of the affected fishermen had been excluded from the sudden and consequent initial wave of donations. Apart from this, those that had lost their homes were mostly relocated permanently to new houses in newly built post-tsunami villages elsewhere, while others refused to leave their home community. For those that remained it was apparent that their villages were quickly changing. Sørensen (1997), in an article about the effects of the Mahaweli development project on villages in the arid zone of Sri Lanka, describes a situation similar to that of post-tsunami coastal Sri Lanka. 'Although the villagers remained in the ancestral village, they had experienced a profound transformation of the physical and social space around them, and this had generated a sense of cultural displacement' (Sørensen 1997: 149). As was made clear in conversations with those that had lost homes and families in the tsunami, and had chosen to return to their villages, they could hardly recognise their community and changes it had undergone. Looking over my diary entries from 2005 when I returned to conduct fieldwork in 2012, my sense of the place had also altered significantly. In 2005 I arrived in the midst of a long process of post-disaster recovery and my initial perception of coastal Sri Lanka was of a community in a state of flux. The disaster and foreign relief interventions had brought about change in the people and place. My initial perceptions and observations were what enabled me to understand the present tensions over land ownership, as well as the political process that emerged as a coping mechanism for these changes. Thus, this thesis benefits from my long term participant observation in post-disaster recovery and considers the disaster as a process that attempts to establish order out of disorder.

My hosts during my first four months in Sri Lanka in 2005 were an elite family who had just returned from the United States after almost two decades, to care for their family following the tsunami. They were our local project administrators and they made a point of constantly reminding us to beware of the fishermen and other 'village-types'. They told us these groups were in the habit of lying and they were greedy for money, as well as being violent. They related how, only a few days prior to our arrival, the police had found a man with a slit throat in the centre of a fishing village and added that fishermen were in the habit of abducting people at random, killing them and chopping up their bodies for bait. With these stories in mind I was secretly nervous about making contact with the fishermen. So, it was with some trepidation that a Maltese friend and I took a walk along the coast to meet some fishermen.

Figure 1 Typical post-tsunami IDP Camp

Figure 2 Where the river meets the sea

We arrived at a point where the river meets the sea (Fig. 2) and, rather foolishly, decided that it looked like a good place to have a swim. We stripped down to our boxers and waded in. As we were waist deep in the water we heard yelling behind us. A man had emerged from the thick wall of coconut palms and foliage and was beckoning to us in earnest. We made our way back and in broken English, the man said, 'No swim – bad current. Crocodile!'[3] He pointed to a spot on the beach, thirty metres from where we had entered the water, where a large saltwater crocodile lay lounging in the sun. After thanking him profusely, we introduced ourselves. After talking to him for half an hour we learned that his name was Chooti, and that he was a fisherman.

Chooti asked us if we would like to go out on a catamaran with his friend. At this point I remembered our hosts' warnings. My colleague and I looked at each other, and nodded in agreement, saying that we would very much like to take the trip. We had both thought that at least we would be together on the trip. However, when it came to it, we found ourselves separated and placed in different catamarans. As we walked to opposite ends of the beach we glanced back at each other in trepidation. 'Should we run?' I thought to myself. It was too late for that, however. I soon found myself in the boat facing my fisherman-companion, my legs were cramped into the narrow gap and we were being gently tossed atop the waves. The boat was filled with water, blood, blackened moss and fish entrails. The fisherman spoke no English. The sun was scorching hot and through the glare I could just make out my friend's boat in the distance. I was quite nervous, but calmed down considerably as my companion finished hauling up the net laden with fish and began to row back, looking me up and down with an amused grin. I felt foolish for having believed I could be in danger. Chandrika's warnings had had their desired effect. Back on the beach Chooti welcomed us with a beaming smile, and we shared a cigarette as the fishermen unwrapped the catch from the nets. He asked with gestures and more broken English which fish we liked best from the pile. We selected two, and he explained in his broken English that his sister would cook them for us that night. It seemed that we had been invited to dinner with a fisherman and his family.

This singular event set up what was the first in a series of relationships that would endure for years. It was a chance meeting which set the pattern of relationships with the fishing community and established certain biases. It was my first taste of class tensions between city elite and 'village-

[3] Throughout this thesis I reproduce what my local informants said to me verbatim in Sinhala English. Many of my informants spoke a fair amount of English and where possible attempted to speak to me in English to compensate for my sometimes poor grasp of spoken Sinhala. I reproduce what they said word for word as it adds an extra dimension to the narratives and descriptions I present in this thesis. Locals are in contact with foreigners on a regular basis and the reproduction of their exact words allows us to see how they perceive of and communicate concepts, emotions and problems in their everyday lives. In some rare cases I have not reproduced the Sinhala English quotes when it was impossible for me to record exactly what people were saying (being caught without a notepad) or where I required someone to translate for me.

types' in Sri Lanka, and it alerted me to the concept of *boru* (lies/deception). The couple with whom I lived were both of the English-speaking upper class. They owned substantial tea estates and properties around the island. They spoke Sinhala only to their staff and usually in a derogatory tone. They often claimed that 'village-people' were the scourge of Sri Lanka, especially coastal people such as fishermen, whom they viewed as foul and violent. Hill country people, to them, were also liars but, unlike fishermen, 'they knew their place'. During the first three months, much to the chagrin of our hosts, we met up with the fishermen every evening in their village, or the camps where they were being temporarily housed.

My subsequent entry into the fishing village of Thomale was established through the relationships formed during this early period. During those first months, I had my first forays into using Sinhala. I remember asking my hosts what the word for fisherman was, to which they responded *malu käriya*. This response was a vulgar play on the word *malu-karaya* (literally fish worker), meaning something like 'fish wanker' [*käri* is a slang word for semen]. Using such a term meant they could refer to fishermen publicly in a derogatory way and get away with it. So when in the early days I used this word with the fishermen I could not understand why they grimaced. They later explained that this was not the best word to use and instructed me to use *dhiväreyā,* a more dignified term meaning fisherman.

Kirsten Hastrup has referred to the defining moments of fieldwork, as 'raw moments'. During such moments:

> an unknown territory arises on the margins of the coded space, and the entire topography seems to shift around through a process of transcoding. The raw moments are thresholds of knowledge, and in lived narratives they reflect Bakhtin's chronotope of the threshold (1996: 248), also by their being highly charged with emotion (Hastrup 2010: 204).

Hastrup is here talking about the experience of a place, an experience that is both sensual (as in experienced through the senses) and emotional, that is, divorced from pragmatic experience. My first contact with a Sri Lankan community attempting to rebuild itself following a disaster, allowed me to experience threshold moments of moral deliberation connected to the disaster and its aftermath. Locals questioned why the tsunami had occurred and what had it revealed about themselves and about other people it brought them in contact with. Although I was not there at the time of the tsunami, I lived through the period of 'reconstruction' or 'rehabilitation' (as NGOs referred to this period), and thus I witnessed and was part of pivotal moments in the long process of recovery that, I argue, is still ongoing.

After three months of living at Chandrika's home, the constant and unwarranted disdain expressed by my hosts towards 'village-people', and especially fishermen, had begun to irritate and even anger me. Two events during this period resulted in the breakdown of relations with the Matara family. Eventually, a full-blown conflict landed me firmly in the communities I would end up studying. Moreover, the dispute made me even more sceptical of the whole development and ODA (overseas development assistance) architecture.

The woman of the elite family I was residing with, Chandrika, was also in charge of the school where we were required by the NGO we were working for to teach English. Together with her husband, they had also taken over the only hotel in Po. After two months in Sri Lanka, Chandrika had asked our Head at the NGO to increase our teaching hours, in a bid, I suspect, to reduce the number of available hours left to us to deal with the fishing co-operative, especially since Po was some distance away. After some time, the head of the NGO agreed to her requests, and we were asked to set up some English classes in Po for the staff at the hotel. It was clear on arrival that the staff were being forced to attend the lessons, and that we were providing a service for the benefit of the hotel rather than for the locals. I went for a walk around the village after the first lesson, surveying the damaged houses and enjoying the quiet beach. On my walk I noticed a few ramshackle guesthouses hidden in tiny alleyways, concealed by overgrown vegetation and debris left over by the tsunami. They doubled up as homes with a few rooms to rent and a small makeshift restaurant shack attached. I also noticed that every few metres were placards advertising the various projects and NGOs still operating in the area.

I had been working with the fishermen in Thomale and Matara Fort for three months at this point and was becoming familiar with their village and their social and economic situation. What had struck me then as I walked through Po was that although the damage caused by the tsunami was still very clearly visible, the extent of reconstruction, NGO presence, and projects was much more elevated and pronounced than in the fishing communities, where reconstruction aid was almost non-existent. This struck me as odd because Thomale villagers had suffered more damage and loss and were clearly in a much more vulnerable position. The realisation that many of the most severely affected victims of the disaster had been completely left out of rehabilitation efforts, coupled with the continuous disparaging comments and attitudes towards the fishing communities, left me with feelings of melancholy and frustration. I had been told numerous times since arriving that the government had imposed a buffer-zone that prohibited reconstruction and repair of houses along the coast. It was said that this was done in a bid to prevent another similar disaster befalling those living near the sea.

> The government has decided to declare the land area 100 metres from the coast as a reservation.
>
> Chairman of the Urban Development Authority, Gemunu Silva said that the construction of new buildings and effecting repairs to existing buildings in that reservation will be strictly prohibited.
>
> As such permission will not be granted to repair houses, hotels or any other buildings in this area destroyed by tsunami disaster [sic].
>
> He said that housing schemes will be started for the victims in the interior of the country. However the housing schemes of fisheries families will be located close to these zones.
>
> On inquiry, the UDA Chairman said that houses and tourist hotels remaining intact after tidal waves will also have to be removed as they are likely to be in danger in future." (Sri Lankan Daily Mirror, January 03, 2005)

However, it struck me as odd that new guest houses, hotels, tourist facilities and luxury homes were sprouting up all along the coast and within metres of the beach. It would seem that the tsunami had provided the perfect excuse to clear valuable coastal lands of undesirable groups and individuals. Although unaware at the time, I later came to realise that localities such as Po were being overrun by outsiders, resulting in major disruption and displacement of sections of the community (see also Sørensen 1997 for similar examples in the Dry zone of Sri Lanka).

At the local school in Po which had been severely damaged by the tsunami, we met an American working with an NGO focused on aiding the diving community in Po and the surrounding villages. The NGO's projects were aimed at training divers to safely take tourists out diving and to upgrade the equipment they had. The American asked us if we would be interested in giving some classes for some of the local divers and village youths. We agreed and this was how I met Lasantha who went on to become one of my main informants and friends in Po.[4]

Lasantha turned up for our first lesson in an ironed shirt, pressed trousers and polished black shoes. He stood out from the youths and had clearly come to impress. We held our classes in the open yard of the tsunami-damaged school using the remnants of broken chairs and desks. We had around thirty regular and seemingly enthusiastic students. The men sat on one side, the young women on

[4] Although I provide examples and case studies involving many other locals of Po and Thomale, Lasantha and his immediate family are the focus of many examples. In Po, there were four main families involved in the tourism business. Due to my long term association with Lasantha, and the competitiveness between families involved in the tourist business, it was difficult for me to become involved with Lasantha and his family's business rivals.

the other. There was constant teasing, gleeful mocking and flirting between the two sides. It was a pleasure to watch and an even greater pleasure when I became the topic of their mockery. I took it as a sign of acceptance. Two weeks into the classes, Lasantha invited us over for dinner at his house. He said he wanted to thank us for what we were doing. It was clear to me even then that he had no need for English lessons. His English was well advanced and he clearly had something else in mind. Partly out of curiosity and partly drawn in by his charm, we accepted.

Figure 3 Lasantha and his cousin Donald at an English lesson.

Figure 4 House destroyed by the disaster in Po, many houses remained in this state with previous owners refusing to part with the land or rebuild their homes in the village.

Figure 5 One of the many signs adorning coastal communities, evidence of the NGO presence.

At dinner at Lasantha's home we were introduced to his wife and two children. After we had finished eating, he brought out some faded photos. His home was located less than thirty metres from the beach and it had been completely destroyed in the tsunami save for half of a small ten metre squared room that now served as their kitchen. The photos showed the house before the disaster. Other photos were taken immediately after. One showed a somewhat distraught Lasantha clutching the back of his head with one hand, the other hand hanging loosely at his side. He was standing in the centre surrounded by a pile of debris, ankle deep in water, bits of paper floating about, broken pieces of furniture protruding out of the rubble, and a foreigner standing beside him looking out into the distance. He continued leafing through the photos explaining each one as he did so. He showed us photos of some foreigners, a family of foreign tourists, who had given him some money towards the restoration of his house. With the money they gave him and a small amount he received from the government he had managed to rebuild three rooms. We were crammed together with his family for dinner in one of these rooms and the remaining two rooms were being used as basic rooms for possible (paying) guests, of which he had had a few over the previous months. He showed us photos of foreign friends who had died in the tsunami and told us their individual stories. He never asked us for anything and we left, not with a feeling of pity towards him, but admiration at his resilience in the face of personal tragedy. A month later, I had

returned to my Matara hosts' house one night following an evening of interviews with the fishermen. We were sitting at a table going over the interviews, photos and biographies I and another staff member had collected of the fishermen and their families. Chandrika asked what we were doing and we explained that we had been collecting information regarding the fishermen and their activities. At this she gleefully exclaimed, 'Fantastic! Now we can really screw them'. We were aghast, and responded rather blankly: 'But, we don't want to screw them, we want to help them'. A heated argument ensued at the end of which I declared that I had had enough and would be leaving her house by the end of the week. As I related the events to Lasantha the next day, he let out a sigh of relief. He explained how he had been unable to receive aid from any of the numerous organisations in the area. They had all been attached, in one way or another, to Chandrika and her family. The aid organisations had been discouraged from giving aid directly to the victims but had been convinced to allow Chandrika to act as an intermediary. Effectively, what this meant was that any request for aid had to be made through Chandrika, which involved entering into some sort of patron-client relationship with her.[5] Lasantha stated that Chandrika and her husband were interested in increasing their control in the area in order to expand their hotel and also squash any competition in the hospitality and tourism sector in the village. It was interesting to note that among the hotel staff to whom I taught English none were from the village. Following our fall out with the Matara family, Lasantha invited me to stay at his home. I and the other NGO staff member quit the NGO two weeks later, and were later employed by an expat couple to carry out relief work on their behalf for the following eight months. We remained at Lasantha's house for the duration of our stay.

As Bob Simpson asserts, 'Ethnographers do not just work in different spatial locations, they also work in those locations across time and are themselves subject to particular lifecourse events and processes which we subsume under the label 'ageing'' (Simpson 2006: 127). The rather lengthy narrative I have provided concerning my initial encounters with the two communities I talk about in this thesis is important for at least two reasons. In the first instance, it provides an introduction to the two villages and to some extent defines the roots of the conflicts that I go on to describe between them. These are conflicts that have been initiated by both local and foreign competition for land and resources. It also marks out the villages' polarised development as a result of different levels of post-tsunami development aid. Second, it describes the evolution of my own relationships with the communities I was engaged with over the period of my fieldwork. The ease with which

[5] This was similar to the kind of control she exerted over the fishing co-operative, I later found out. She had managed to draw up contracts in Sinhalese that, on being translated by an interpreter, revealed that the fishermen would have the right to use the boats against a monthly commission calculated as the value of ten per cent of their catch. Ownership of the boats was assigned to Chandrika. The NGO was not aware of this.

some of my informants have shared personal details and experiences, is in a large part due to relationships which have developed over time. Crucially the closeness of many of these relationships stems from shared experiences of life shortly after the tsunami. To understand the context of my 2012-13 fieldwork it is also significant to note that many of the youths I encountered on my daily forays through the village back in 2005 were young children when I first met them. They referred to me as white uncle [*sudu māmā*]. My account also provides a yardstick by which to measure changes in the individual status of key actors and the ways in which changes after the tsunami shaped the current social landscape, as well as the organisation of social relations around place.

In the following sections, I provide field diary extracts from my 2012/3 field research. These are used as a device to introduce themes relevant to the communities I deal with. They provide an introduction to everyday life in Po and Thomale.

Interpreting place

My fieldwork was eventually split between two field sites, at a distance of roughly three kilometres from each other. I spent nine months resident in the fishing village of Thomale and the remaining seven months in the tourist-oriented village of Po. I should make it clear that, although there are a number of guest houses and tourist establishments in Po now, it was not then a major tourist destination, unlike the nearby village of Mirissa. Whilst Mirissa is largely split between tourism and fishing (mainly in the separate harbour area, although a number of fishing families now have stakes in the tourism industry), Po is split between tourism, mason work, coconut rope production, diving (including for tropical aquarium fish, see Howard 2012) and fishing. As already stated, I have spent long periods in the area at various points over the course of almost a decade and each time I was given a glimpse into a different stage of the development taking place post-tsunami. I have asked Lasantha and his family, and other villagers, throughout the course of my stays, some similar questions over the years, and was always surprised, as each time they revealed more details about the same topics. As I pestered informants for details about people, places and events, this would sometimes lead to long conversations and discussions. Often a simple question would tweak somebody's interest and they would ask a cousin or friend. So much so that on later visits previous questions and conversations would be revived and supplemented with new examples. On my return in 2012, for example, I was staying with Lasantha for the first few weeks whilst I looked for a house to rent in Thomale. He was cordial and welcoming as ever. The only difference was that he got into the habit of visiting my room every evening to sit on the terrace and would talk at length

about a variety of topics, some of them quite personal at times. Many of these conversations rekindled old discussions I had had with him.

On one such occasion, we were talking about the tsunami, and he said:

> Buddha say like this will happen. It is because of the bad karma – too many people in Sri Lanka they doing bad things. The tsunami coming for the cleaning the land, see like my family nobody die, but other families many dead. We live in front of the sea, we lose the house but we keep the life. Now we have lot of good luck, many friends, good business, now things are better. You know, Maurice, no dogs die in tsunami, they know, they all run inland; but the scientists they spend lot of money for equipment for find tsunami, then they don't know it coming. See, this because bad karma, coming like a magic, now people see dog or squirrel [*lēna*] running and they also run.

He continued to explain that some people knew the tsunami was coming; some people in the village 'felt it' but no one believed them. He stressed again that people needed to pay more attention to what was around them: 'you know sometimes at midnight dogs make big sound, that because *yakka* (demons) at the crossroads. They can see, we can't, but we can hear the dogs, then we know'.

I had asked on many occasions about the roles animals played in village life but had for a long time received only cursory answers suggesting they weren't very important. The significance of animals in everyday life also only became apparent to me later in my fieldwork. Locals were at first hesitant to tell me about the extent to which some of them relied on animal sightings to organise their daily routines. It later transpired that many were embarrassed to let foreigners know and thought that I would mock them. Some locals recounted how sightings of certain animals, at particular times of the day, or a change in the weather, guided their daily decisions. It was a way of reading place. With many individuals, particularly the elderly, this became a factor influencing the way they would plan their daily routines, and what they could or should do on one day or another. This form of knowledge added to the creation of a sense of place, both for me, as well as for my informants, and provided a connection between people and place and an ongoing narrative of locality. As Candea notes, 'Sites are understood as the products of often conflicting political and epistemological processes 'on the ground', processes which should themselves be the object of anthropological study' (Candea 2007: 171). Locals' embarrassment at what foreigners might think of them and their practices was common among locals who wished to create relations with foreign visitors. In Po this was particularly the case with local guest house owners and locals engaged in the tourism industry in one way or another. They were aware that some foreigners regarded some of their beliefs as backward. The situation in Thomale was altogether different, from the villagers' point of view they

stood to gain little from improving relations with foreigners and regarded them with scorn. Rather, one might say that the differences between Po and Thomale reflected the divide that also existed between these two sites and the outside world.

The tsunami, and more specifically the post-tsunami developments, set the stage for, and redefined the village as a site of contested identities, epistemologies, and politics of place. Land and property was developed, or changed ownership, and the village of Po was opened up to outsiders. In Thomale locals were ignored by NGOs, local government and foreign tourists alike. The village retreated further into itself and did not welcome outside interventions, be it the police or local government officials. In the case of Po, while some welcomed the changes, others found it disorienting and upsetting. The latter has been noted in other studies of post-disaster recovery (Oliver-Smith 1999; Gunewardena 2008; Simpson 2013; Gamburd 2014). Such concentrated developments reorganise place and social relations. Sørensen states, with reference to the arrival of 'outsiders' in a previously traditional village in the dry zone of Sri Lanka, that:

> Their arrival in this remote area not only marked a change in their personal life, but also the creation of this area as a "place". It was only when they arrived that a transformation of nature into social space – or into place – had transpired, and they themselves were the pioneers and catalysts of this process (Sørensen 1997: 153).

Sørensen goes on to talk about the 'civilising' attempts of the outsiders, pushing for the abandonment of traditional forms of cultivation in favour of more contemporary and 'scientific' methods. This situation bears much similarity to the situation in post-tsunami Sri Lanka – although between Po and Thomale, it was only Po that was deemed worthy enough of the 'civilising' efforts of the outsiders.

Foreign expats residing in the area of Po expressed their frustration with local Sinhalese over their lack of punctuality, their unreliability, and the constant challenge of having to chase after them. Conflicting ideas of time and space were the cause of frustration and misunderstanding between foreigners and locals. How do members of each group interpret place? One morning, as I was drinking tea with Saran (Lasantha's wife) in their living area, she strolled out of the kitchen, paused, bent forwards, sighed deeply, then straightened up and touched her hand to her head, at the same time letting loose an '*āpō*'.[6] I inquired as to what was the matter. She pointed to the ground. I peered over from my seat, but could see nothing and looked back up at her questioningly. She responded with, 'you don't see? Red ants coming into the home. That is bad luck [*āsubayi*]. It mean we lose the money'. Throughout the course of my doctoral fieldwork I paid more attention to these

[6] Similar to 'damn' or 'oh dear'.

observations as local relations to place became more ingrained in me. It is not that I didn't notice them before, but as the pressure to collect enough data subsided I allowed myself to focus more on the nuances of the everyday. For example, following the above incident with Saran, some days later I encountered Lasantha in a jovial mood one morning. He looked at me and very nonchalantly stated, 'I see big monitor [*Kabarā*] this morning'. Normally, I might have nodded in acknowledgement and continued about my day, but remembering the previous incident with Saran I asked what this meant. He smiled and said, 'when we see first thing in the morning then this mean good luck for the day. After I see, some tourists coming for the snorkelling, it true'. I asked him about the story of the ants, and he nodded as I did so – 'Yes this also true, I have many bills to pay this month with this home and beach house, and not many tourists coming. Red ants coming and money go, black ants coming and money back, this is the way'.

As more time passed I learnt of other signs – the hoot of the owl [*bassā*], at night meant there would be a funeral in the coming days, whereas the sound of the crow [*kākkha*], first thing in the morning signalled that someone unexpected would be paying a visit (such as a friend one had not seen in a long time). The sound of cats [*pūsa*], fighting was bad luck, and the sound of the cock crowing at midnight meant trouble was coming. The most feared sign of all, are the cries of the devil-bird [*ūlama*] (Lasantha says that fortunately it is rare to hear them in or around Po), which signals the death of a family member. Likewise, there were many signs for approaching rain, such as numerous insects moving at the same time, ants moving in a straight line, dogs eating grass, or sweating profusely during the day meant rain would come in the evening. Following some probing, Lasantha explained that some of these omens affected what people did on certain days, how they conducted their lives. He said it was difficult to explain to foreigners living in the area and there was some embarrassment on the part of locals coupled with the knowledge that such explanations would be disregarded by most foreigners. He explained that sometimes people could not work on certain days because of bad omens. Most of the time, Lasantha said, it would be the women who would urge their husbands to stay at home. He himself did not go to such extremes, but would rather keep a watchful eye out and if plagued by doubt or unable to decipher what he saw, he would then consult the soothsayer [*sāsthra kāraya*].

Throughout my fieldwork concealment was a common accompaniment to everyday events. Husbands concealed romantic affairs, drinking, and gambling from their wives, and women hid money and alcohol from their husbands. Villagers concealed aspects of their personalities and rituals from foreigners, embarrassed that foreigners might consider them irrational or backward. For their part foreigners also concealed parts of their personalities. Some foreigners in a bid to fit in

attempted to portray themselves as different from other Westerners, whilst others who were suspicious of locals' intentions[7]towards them, depicted themselves as either poor on the one hand, or as powerful individuals that should not be 'messed with' (as one Spanish-American tourist put it). Yet through these acts of concealment communication flowed and aspects of a group or individual's perception of the other (as well as of themselves) were revealed through the very act of concealment. For example, the daily performances and strategies to conceal acts of drinking from their wives, and the efforts on the women's part to confiscate and hide alcohol, revealed just how far alcohol seeped into both the domains of the public and private. Some men were puzzled by their wives' attitude to something they had never tried, whilst women couldn't understand what they saw as a waste of money and a detriment to health. While the purposeful misrepresentations between foreigners and locals are indicative of the rift that sometimes exists between these two groups, concealment here seems to be an attempt at facilitating communication and interaction between two seemingly different worlds. Locals attempt to accommodate the foreigners' world-view and vice versa.

Locals also attempt to speak to the world concealed to them, or the invisible. By invisible here I refer to events and ideas (subjective over objective) that are not tangible, such as death as a process, the future, and gods, demons, and spirits. For example, through the soothsayer [*sāsthra kāraya*], locals attempt to understand what will happen in the future and try to determine their best course of action. While, on the other hand, other rituals allow them to come to terms with loss and formulate interpretations of death, the afterlife and peculiarities in their everyday lives.

In a ritual known as the *Bahiravā puja* (Chapter 7), villagers determine that problems affecting their land or property result from the mischievous meddling of *prēta*s. These are spirits of the dead, usually previous owners of the land, who would have remained too attached to their land and other worldly things. The purchase of village land by so many outsiders following the tsunami altered the boundaries of the community. They determined and limited the geographical and social mobility of locals, who through the *puja* ritual's attempt to pacify the *prēta*s reassert their legitimacy over the land and, by default, their community. The ritual is also performed for foreigners or other outsiders who acquire land in the village, and with whom there are friendly relations. The ritual unbinds the *prēta*s from the land they plague, and in the process binds the new owners to the land instead. The ritual thus cleanses the land and through the lengthy ritual process, strengthens the bonds between

[7] From the numerous conversations with tourists passing through the area, many were fearful of being overcharged or scammed for being Westerners. A handful of tourists had described being assaulted or harassed by youths in popular beach towns such as Hikkaduwa. The encounters had started off friendly enough but had degenerated later in the evenings.

community members present at the ritual. The troublesome *prēta*s that represent disorder are expelled, and order is restored. As Victor Turner noted,

> Ritual, scholars are coming to see, is precisely a mechanism that periodically converts the obligatory into the desirable. The basic unit of ritual, the dominant symbol, encapsulates the major properties of the total ritual process which brings about this transmutation (Turner 1967: 30).

In this case, the obligatory could be represented by the need to quell the appetites of the *prēta* for worldly things; they are the symbol of intrusion and disorder, on the one hand, and an inseparable part of their community on the other. Outsiders who do not benefit from friendly relations with locals also represent a form of disorder. The ritual is thus not performed for them and they are excluded from the community, a factor further reinforced by the knowledge that people will stay clear of them for fear of being harassed by the *prēta* that inhabit their land.

Moving through the field or mobile ethnography

When I eventually moved to Thomale in late February 2012, I took up residence in a small house by the river. The house was thirty metres away from the fish market, a short row of shabby wooden stalls stained with fish entrails. This place was the social heart of the village and the part most congruent with the identity of its residents. Fish sellers [*malu mudalali*] would emphatically point at the market area and say 'here is Thomale'. I had a small terrace that protruded out onto a broken path that led to the market area and allowed me to observe what was going on in the centre. Most importantly, it allowed me to glimpse which visitors might be rapping away at my door. I could thus, prepare myself. I had experienced many occasions when visitors would turn up drunk, either in the hope of getting more drink or money off of me or else, in the case of close friends and acquaintances, attempt to drag me off to one of the covert little bars concealed in the thick canopy of jungle foliage. On these occasions I would, more often than not, have to contribute a substantial amount of money in support of the ongoing revelry. Thus, I always kept an ear pricked up for singing, shouting, or loud laughing as visitors approached, and a watchful eye out for the all too familiar swagger of the determined drinker walking, or stumbling, across the dusty path.

As I settled into life in Thomale I began to craft a routine. I was interested in everyday life between (both in terms of comparison and exchange) the two communities of Po and Thomale. For the first nine months I was living in Thomale, I could not overlook my long-standing friendships in Po, both on

a personal level as well as in terms of research. The market at Thomale would be buzzing between eleven in the morning and three in the afternoon. At between five and six in the morning, I would leave the house and cycle the three kilometres or so to Po. Such a trip should have taken me no longer than twenty minutes to half an hour, but it never did. As the trip to Po became a part of my daily routine, I would meet the same people along my route, and as they got used to me, they would smile, nod and wave at first, then after the first week, signal to me to stop. Gossip and news travelled fast. Many had inquired about this shabby little foreign man cycling nonchalantly down their village paths. I found out later that many knew of my history as an aid worker. Some had refused to have any contact with me because of this history and openly disliked me. Others had given me elaborate narratives of suffering and loss, in the hope that I would direct some aid towards them. It took two to three months for most people to realise that I was no longer affiliated with NGOs, but thankfully our conversations continued and, if anything, they became warmer.

My daily cycles could take anywhere between an hour to two hours, as I was stopped, or myself stopped, along the route to exchange pleasantries, gossip, news, deliver messages, or simply have a tea. On average, I would make anywhere between eight and ten stops along the route, some days more and others less. It allowed me to create what I will call a mobile ethnography, a series of conversations joined together over time and across a specific space. Figure 6 provides a map of my field site, and my bicycle route marked out in black, and along this route are marked the most significant and frequent stops.

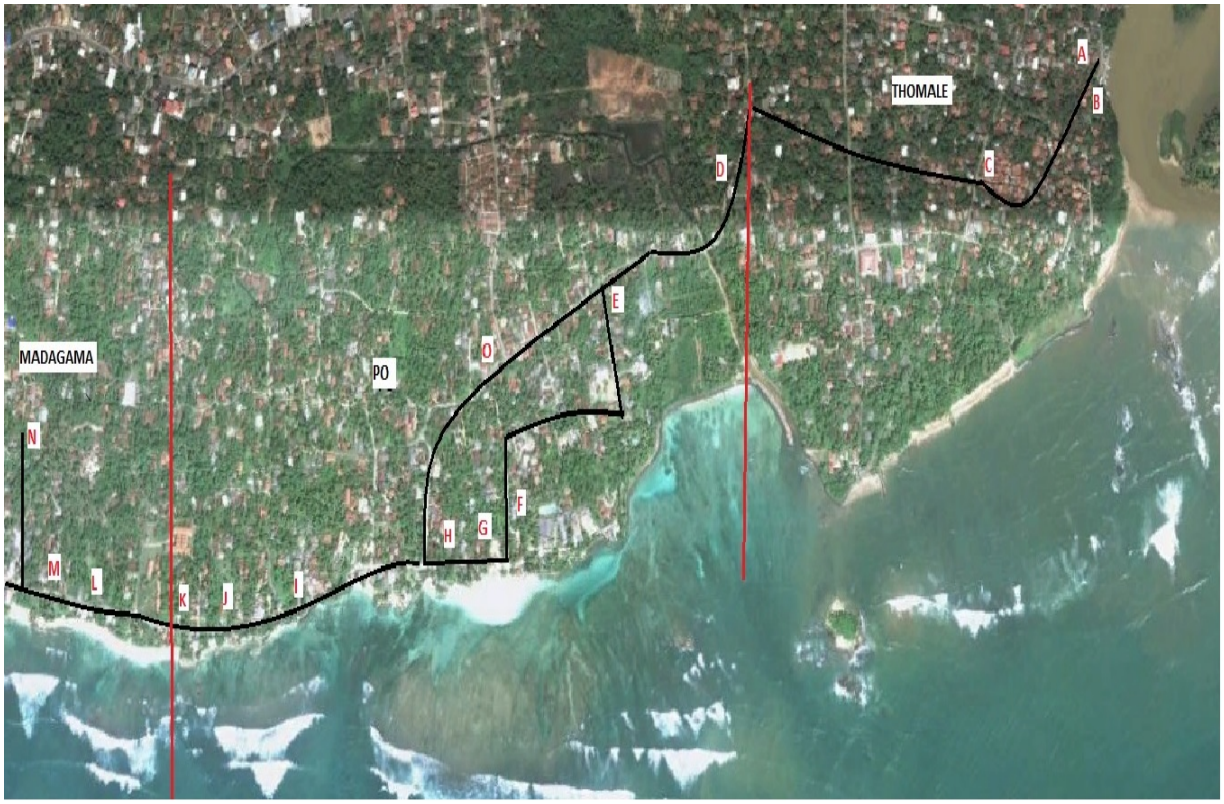

Figure 6 Map of field site – the black line marks out the daily bicycle route, the red lines are the locally understood boundaries between localities.

The point marked 'A' in the map provided in figure 6, indicates the starting point of my route and the position of my home, whilst 'B' is the centre of Thomale and its fish market. Point 'C' is a crossroad that delimits the entry to the core of the village of Thomale. Beyond this crossroads the area is still considered to be part of the domain of Thomale, but is also linked by a road to the main road running along the coast. There would always be a number of men collected at the crossroads, who would be engaged in gossip, especially around full moon days [*poyā*]. The men would serve as a lookout for the police patrols that would often stop at the linking road a few hundred metres further away. The need for lookouts, I found out later, was because a few houses in the area were popular hot spots for the black market sale of coconut spirit [*arrack*] on *poyā* days when it is prohibited to sell alcohol. One day, three months into living in Thomale, I had stopped at the crossroad for a chat and asked one of the men why people would often be coming and going from two houses further down the path, to which they smiled, looked about them and said, *'arraku'* and made a drinking gesture with their hand (I was months later, taken there by a friend, Toni, to purchase a bottle on the evening of a *poyā*). The continual meetings with people along the route allowed me to develop a familiarity not only with the people, but also the physical geography, and consequently to be able to get a sense of my field site as place. In the process, it exposed, through time, concealed elements

of the communities I engaged with, and allowed me to recognise which activities were routine and which were not. In his reflexive account of fieldwork in Morocco, Rabinow (1977) relates how he himself began to uncover aspects of the lives of his informants that were not immediately apparent (1977: 59).

On average, twice a week, I would be invited to David's house, an expat who had been residing in the area for twelve years at the time of writing. In the map in figure 6, his home is marked as 'N'. Often there would be other long-residing expats collected for lunch, discussing various events they had observed from living in their respective villages. They were curious meetings in which the expats tried to grapple with the local way of life, and to commiserate with one another on how to deal with the 'troublesome and ambiguous locals', as Martin, a British expat, liked to refer to locals. David always remained aloof. He had lived there long enough to realise the limitations of his status and position and the nature of his relationships with villagers. It was very clear that he enjoyed the company of his guests, but was also amused at their tales of distress. In a similar way, Rabinow notes how his somewhat neutral position among the expats in Morocco allowed him access to a wealth of information, he notes:

> The whole structure of the relations between them was easy to formulate and the needs of the various participants were such that they were in search of an outside observer to whom they could recount their troubles and reflections. I was in no position to threaten them, or to offer direct economic or political assistance. In retrospect, this climate was ideal for anthropological inquiry (Rabinow 1977: 19).

I found that the expats at David's dinner parties felt comfortable talking freely about their troubles to me. In fact they were fascinated to find I was living in the villages and perplexed to find out I was recording people's everyday lives over such a long period of time. David's guests talked about their experiences and perceptions of people. They contrasted their perceptions with the expectations they had of Sri Lanka and the locals prior to their arrival. In doing so they reminded me of some of the key aspects of Sinhalese society that were most 'salient' to the outside observer (see Crapanzano 2010).

As far as many of the expats were concerned the villagers led dull, repetitive lives, spending their time lazing about and going to the temple. My daily bicycle rides, and the interactions these led to, revealed the complexity of everyday local life. For example, as I became more acquainted with some of my neighbours and their families, they began to approach me with warnings and bits of advice. I had been invited a number of times to a neighbour's house two doors down from me. The householder, Ramesh, was a distant relation of another close friend from Thomale, Podi (a part-time

fisherman). We would drink tea and he would tell me about various characters in the village and the surroundings; who to be careful with, and who not to associate with. In the early days of fieldwork I had talked frequently to one of the fish mongers [*malu mudalali*s] in my road. He was quite big and burly and seemed like a nice enough man and, except for occasional trouble with his goat, we got on quite well. Ramesh had advised me against getting too friendly with him but refused to elaborate further. Some days later I asked Lasantha about the fish monger, and he said, 'Ah, he bad man, better you stay away. He selling the heroin and marihuana (known locally as *ganja*) – he selling before to Toni, that how Toni lose everything.' It transpired that, at least the use of *ganja* was quite widely spread among the two villages and, in some areas, also the use of heroin. A thick clump of trees by the coast was a regular meeting place for many youths and some local divers and fishermen. They would share news about the season, how the fishermen further down the coast were faring, sometimes drinking, and other times smoking *ganja*. They informed me that there were many people in the three villages who were involved in the sale, use, and production of *ganja*. This activity supplemented their daily income through sale to tourists and other locals who would come from the neighbouring villages and the town of Matara to buy.

Thus, during my frequent stops along my daily bicycle route the experience of locals' everyday routine briefly formed part of my own experience of the everyday. As Andrew Beatty has also noted:

> As we are socialised into the host community and begin to incorporate its unspoken presuppositions, we share – as our hosts, too, recognise – common experience in ever more subtle and comprehensive ways. And we begin to make better sense of our hosts' independent experiences. This is partly through the acquisition of background knowledge and partly through the dialectical movement between sympathy and empathy (Beatty 1999: 76).

The daily bicycle rounds allowed me to become a frequent presence in the area and assimilated me into locals' everyday experience. Much like Geertz's (1977) 'knowing wink', this familiarisation with the fringe and background scenarios, allowed me to pass along my morning routes and receive the knowing look. For example, one morning as I walked past a local tea shop in Po I bumped into Lalith, a diver who spent most of his money on alcohol much to the chagrin of his wife. His buxom wife far surpassed him in physical strength and other villagers teased him as a result, warning him to be careful otherwise his wife would beat him if he misbehaved. When I saw Lalith outside the tea shop, his lip and the left side of his face were swollen and bruised. He seemed startled upon seeing me, quickly attempted to cover his bruised face with his hand, and following a brief exchange of pleasantries he excused himself before I had the chance to ask what had happened to him. As soon

as Lalith left, a group of three youths sitting by the side of the tea shop shrieked with laughter, as one of the youths nodded his head at me as if to say I told you so. Lalith later claimed to have fallen whilst drunk but that did not seem to matter to the youths, what mattered was the continuation of an inside joke based on their intimate knowledge of Lalith's affairs. The youth's nod directed at me was an acknowledgement of shared information about Lalith's habits and domestic life. Throughout fieldwork – nods, winks, nudges, and cheeky grins served as a form of social code for the sharing of intimate knowledge. As Falzon aptly puts it, 'The ethnographer here appears as circumambulist, daily retracing their steps and in so doing producing the site and knowledge about it. Spatial routine becomes a route to ethnographic knowledge' (Falzon 2009: 9). As I have indicated earlier in this chapter, concealment is a common aspect of everyday life in Po and Thomale, and often acts of concealment revealed other social nuances. With this in mind, in the next section I look more closely at the roles deception and lying play in both hiding and revealing.

Boru – the art of deception

Of the many expats I had regular encounters with – all were convinced that one of the defining characteristics of the Sinhalese was their propensity for lying. It has also been noted in numerous works, both ethnographic, as well as historical that the Sinhalese are particularly prone to lying (Knox 1681; Gombrich 1971; Spencer 1990a; Argenti-Pillen 2007). Lying may act as a form of concealment, joking, or character testing, but lying is generally thought to be intersubjective – combining reality and fiction (Gillespie and Cornish 2010). Although Argenti-Pillen recognises the multifarious character of the lie, *boru*, in Sri Lanka, she defines it as 'obvious pretence', and says that its use is tantamount to 'revelation, rather than concealment' (Argenti-Pillen 2007: 313). Furthermore, she states that,

> The tone of obvious pretence (*boru*) within the different contexts I discuss evokes two types of relationships: on the one hand a relationship of domination, aggression, and superiority; on the other hand a relationship of accommodation, conflict avoidance, and courtship

and emphasises that she understands

> the most common use of *boruva* at the local level as a general form of conflict avoidance (Argenti-Pillen 2007: 322).

Although *boru* may sometimes be used for conflict avoidance, and indeed in some contexts were used for revelation, I did not note the same dominant understanding of *boru* as 'obvious pretence'

noted by Argenti-Pillen. The frequency with which locals believed each other's lies was evidence that it was not obvious. Lies were not so much about conflict avoidance in the coastal communities I lived in, as they were about avoiding discomfort in contentious or embarrassing social situations. Lying was mostly about outright deception, whether this was to demean rivals, protect one's assets or investments, demonstrate superiority, humiliate others or mask the reality of an event. In many situations, lies were actually about creating conflict and assessing the resultant reaction. Rabinow records an example of the use of lies in rural Morocco that conforms to one of the ways in which they are used in coastal Sri Lanka:

> On the second morning, Ibrahim announced not only that he had no relatives in Marrakech but that he had unfortunately forgotten to bring along enough money to pay for his room. This was one of my first direct experiences of Otherness. Ibrahim was simply testing the limits of the situation. Within Moroccan culture this is a standardized and normal thing to do, as I was to find out. He was pushing to see if I would pay for his trip (Rabinow 1977: 28-29).

Much of the time in both Po and Thomale, a number of friends and acquaintances, especially Toni and Podi (my closest friends and informants in Thomale) would initially come up with elaborate stories about their difficulties re-paying debts to loan sharks, or being in dire need of money for medicine, only for me to find them drinking at the local bar or swaggering drunk down the village pathways, after having received my contribution to help ease their woes. I quickly learned to side-track these approaches, until they openly started asking me for contributions for drink, to which I would oblige every now and again.[8]

During the first months of fieldwork a number of locals assumed I still worked with an NGO. For this reason, I was stopped in the street and visited by people who would recount elaborate stories of death and destruction in the hope of receiving monetary aid. It was only later that I found out that most of these people were really quite well off and no misfortune had befallen them. On hearing of some small donations I had given, Lasantha would shake his head and take great pleasure in laughing mockingly at me. He would sometimes turn to me and imitating a frail old man, extend a wobbly hand in supplication, saying 'Please *sudu*[9], very poor man, I need medicine', and would burst out laughing immediately after. *Boru* were a part of everyday life. A skilled liar concealed or altered the truth about himself and in the process revealed much about the person he lied to. There was no greater pleasure than when one managed to fool a close friend. As Gilsenan also notes,

[8] Friends of both Toni and Podi advised me to donate money for *arrack* from time to time, even though both men had a drinking problem. When I asked why I should donate money, their friends explained that without money for *arrack* Toni and Podi would purchase the much cheaper and illicitly produced *kasippu* which was much more harmful to them.

[9] White, as in white man

> Here the lie is simply a matter of tricking another, often by coordinated effort, and demonstrating in a simple way an ability to fool him. The essence of it consists precisely in the liar's ultimately *revealing* the lie and claiming his victory: I'm lying to you, you ate it! In the laughter there is a sense of superiority, the fleeting dominance of A over B (Gilsenan 1976: 192).

I came to understand the significance of lying in male sociality as a form of character testing as well as of humiliation in order to establish superiority, whether this was done jokingly or not.

The practice of lying between men and women, and especially between spouses, took on a different character. One of Lasantha's favourite stories was of his marriage proposal to his wife Saran. The couple are distant cousins, as well as from the same village. They were brought up only a couple of hundred metres from each other. As he approached her initially, she would shout at him to leave her alone and ignore him whenever she passed by him. She said, 'I liked him very much, but I wanted to see if he still came after me when I didn't talk to him'. Lasantha threatened to drink pesticide if she didn't give in and marry him, but Saran said, 'I knew he would not, I knew it was *boru'.* Lasantha then climbed to the top of the tallest coconut tree in Po and shouted down that he would jump if she did not agree to marry him, at which point she finally agreed. Lasantha says, 'I would not have jumped and I was scared that if she say no, I would have had to come down and then everyone laugh at me'. Conversely, threats of suicide were commonplace between spouses, in a bid to exert control over each other's behaviour (see episode described in Chapter 8). Lasantha would say of such threats by Saran regarding his drinking , that he knew they were *boru*, but they signalled to him the seriousness of her displeasure with his behaviour and for the sake of peaceful relations, would stop drinking for a while or take extra care to keep it hidden from her.

Argenti-Pillen (2007) gives the example of a nineteen year old man who told his fifteen and seventeen year old female cousins that he would not be joining them on the annual pilgrimage to *Sri Pada* (Adam's Peak, a pilgrimage site atop a mountain believed to house Buddha's footprint), as he did not want to miss his daily volleyball game with his friends. The girls began protesting but he firmly refused to join, at the same time secretly enjoying their requests and complaints. The next day he turned up on the bus headed for *Sri Pada* and on noting this, the girls began screaming '*boruva, boruva!*' (Argenti-Pillen 2007: 316-317). In the same way both Lasantha and Saran were testing each other through *boru*.

Throughout my stay in both Po and Thomale, most married men I knew claimed to have had many affairs with other women. Occasionally these were tourists, and at other times prostitutes. Gombrich notes in relation to his own fieldwork in Sri Lanka that, 'nearly all the adult males there

had committed adultery when opportunity arose' (Gombrich 1971:260 and cited in Spencer 1990a: 197). I was always rather surprised at this, especially when I observed seemingly close relations between husband and wife. When I inquired about this, I was simply told, 'the wife for the home, and other women for enjoy'.

When brothers and cross-cousins were drinking together, lies were co-ordinated as a group to successfully conceal their whereabouts from their wives. The same tactics were employed to conceal one's whereabouts when drinking covertly with some close friends. I recall many occasions where the men would be collected in some hidden nook on the coast or among the trees and Saran would call all the other members of the party there. I watched as each one acted out carefully planned and rehearsed lies. On my return home, and upon meeting Saran, she would ask, 'You see Lasantha?' to which I would respond in the negative, and she responded with, 'He drinking, I know, one time I will catch him and then trouble.' I always felt a pang of guilt as I too had been roped in as an accomplice in the cycle of deception.

Lies were often used to discredit adversaries or people of lower status. The example at the beginning of this chapter of Chandrika's lies about the fishermen is one such instance. During my fieldwork, she was also responsible for spreading a lie about Lasantha where she claimed he had sexually harassed a foreign woman on the beach. Although foreign friends of Lasantha had run to his aid to attest to his innocence, the lie had been circulated and the damage had been done among the circle of Matara elite, foreigners and friends accessible to Chandrika, yet inaccessible to Lasantha or his friends and family when it came to a denial of the accusation. Chandrika's high social standing left little to doubt among people outside Lasantha's social group that he had done what Chandrika claimed. He was also unable to attack her in the same way as he is of an inferior social standing to Chandrika. As I stated in the beginning of this section, lying also serves to demonstrate dominance and superiority over the individual being lied to/about. In an example taken from his fieldwork in Sri Lanka, Spencer (1990) explains how villagers told him to be wary of two families that were not to be trusted, because they had been poor and had suddenly grown rich and prosperous. Out of jealousy [*irisiyāva*] a member of one of these families had been reported to the police and was arrested. The arrested man was quickly released when police were informed by the man's friends that the reports were a result of *irisiyāva* (Spencer 1990a: 176). However the act of being arrested is still a situation that causes shame [*lajjawa*] as all eyes are on that person. *Irisiyāva* is locally understood as the primary motivation for lies of this nature. In fact, Spencer notes that following the friends' testimonials to the man's good character, it was enough for them to cite *irisiyāva* as the cause of the trouble for the police to release him.

As I have emphasised, *boru* constitute a central aspect of the practice of everyday life. Although loosely translated as lying, *boru* encompass more than just the concealment of truth, they are part of a rhetorical mechanism that reveals the depth of social relationships. Through the act of both concealing and revealing, *boru* allow for the possible identification of key themes in the formation, maintenance, and breakdown of social relationships. Had I not had access to conversations about Lalith, I would not have known why the youths were laughing at his misfortune. Similarly, I will most likely never know whether Lalith received a beating from his wife or whether he had in fact fallen whilst drunk. Gilsenan (1976) writes about the visit of an outside sheikh to the Lebanese village where he conducted his research. A youth, locally known as a joker, creates an elaborate lie to determine whether the sheikh is skilled enough to see through his lie. The youth draws out the Sheikh's lie through his own lie, and in the process humiliates him. Gilsenan states,

> The visitor made the common-enough mistake of assuming that the transmitter of messages and culturally endorsed signs is in control of their meaning, and forgetting that meaning is also given to messages in social life by others (Gilsenan 1976: 210).

In this chapter I have given a background to the area and some of the people that are the focus of this thesis. I have outlined how I collected information, dealt with some everyday scenarios and how I have experienced the place throughout my fieldwork. My focus on concealment and revelation reflects the process of writing this thesis – that is, to grapple with these culturally endorsed signs, and relay their meaning and, more importantly, identify the social processes that lend them meaning. This chapter has provided the background to my experience of the everyday life in a Sinhalese community, which takes as its starting point, the aftermath of a critical event, the Asian tsunami of 2004. The chapter analyses some of the effects on the people, places and politics that have structured the eventful road to recovery and the restoration of order in the coastal area.

In the next chapter I take a closer look at the social, economic, and physical effects of the tsunami disaster, using case studies of individual experiences of the disaster from both Po and Thomale. The chapter outlines the real effects of the tsunami on people living in these two villages, and discusses the land development policies enacted in the aftermath in order to frame the events and observations recorded in the rest of this thesis.

Chapter 3 – Conflicts over land in the aftermath of the Tsunami in Southern Sri Lanka

The tsunami of 26th December 2004 was a critical event in Sri Lanka's recent history. It had disastrous ramifications for the localities it affected; it displaced and killed people, wrecked homes, property, livelihoods, and destroyed many people's sense of security. The tsunami resulted in the deaths of 1,088 persons, 165 missing persons, 29,550 displaced persons and 6,506 displaced families in Matara district alone (Ruhunu University 2005). Out of the whole district, the two communities that are the focus of this thesis were among the most severely affected in the Matara DS (Divisional Secretariat), with loss or damage to over eighty per cent of dwellings (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka).[10] In Po, one of the two villages where I worked, the tsunami affected 2,258 out of 2,645 people, killing 90 and injuring 171, while over 550 buildings out of 660 were completely destroyed including schools and guesthouses (Ruhunu University 2005; Mubarak 2007:22). The following tables (tables 1 – 6) provide detailed information about the extent of the damage to people's properties and livelihoods in Matara district, as well as in Po and Thomale specifically.

The disaster and its aftermath were the focus of global media attention for many months and in some cases for years after the event. The latter in part explains why over 650million dollars in aid were pumped into the country. This aid was in many ways responsible for the considerable changes taking place in villages along the coast and in other parts of the country, as NGOs spent the money as quickly as possible to satisfy donors back home and demonstrate that work was indeed progressing (Gamburd 2014; Stirrat and Henkel 1997; Stirrat 2006). Through the process of rampant distribution of aid foreigners were depicted as wealthy and powerful, whereas locals were depicted in the media as vulnerable, poor and unable to cope without outside aid. These imaginaries are important for understanding relationships between villagers and outsiders and the way post-tsunami developments affected the communities at the centre of this thesis.

[10] http://www.ruh.ac.lk/tsunami/matara.html

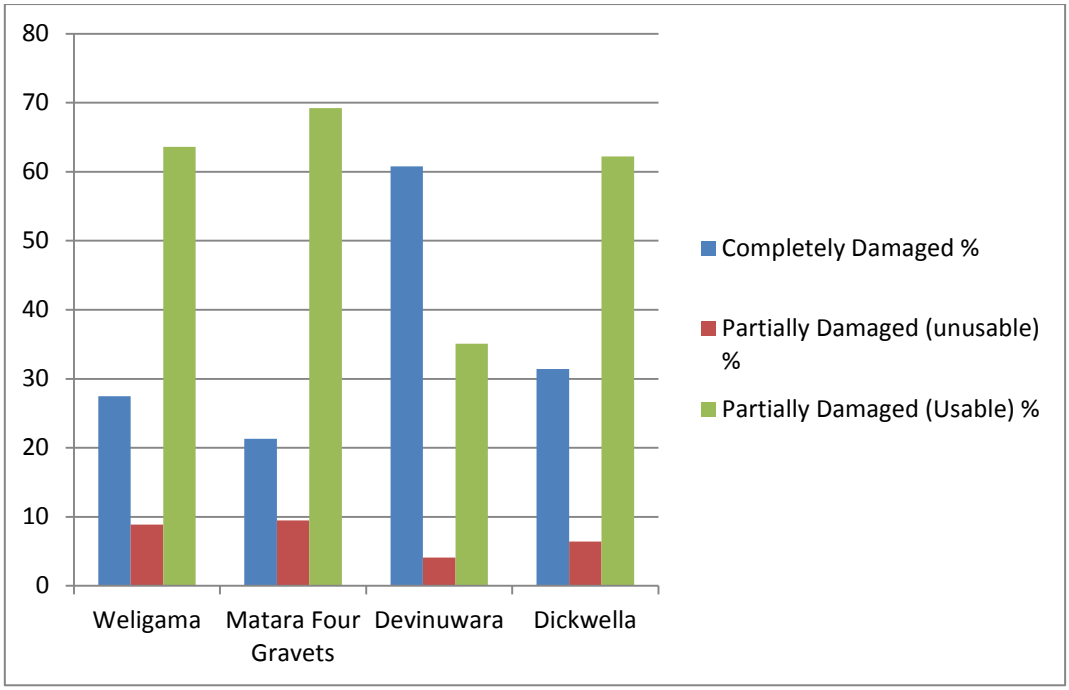

Table 1 Percentage distribution of buildings other than housing units damaged in affected DS divisions by type of damage: Matara District

(Source: adapted from data available in the Department of Census and statistics 2005)

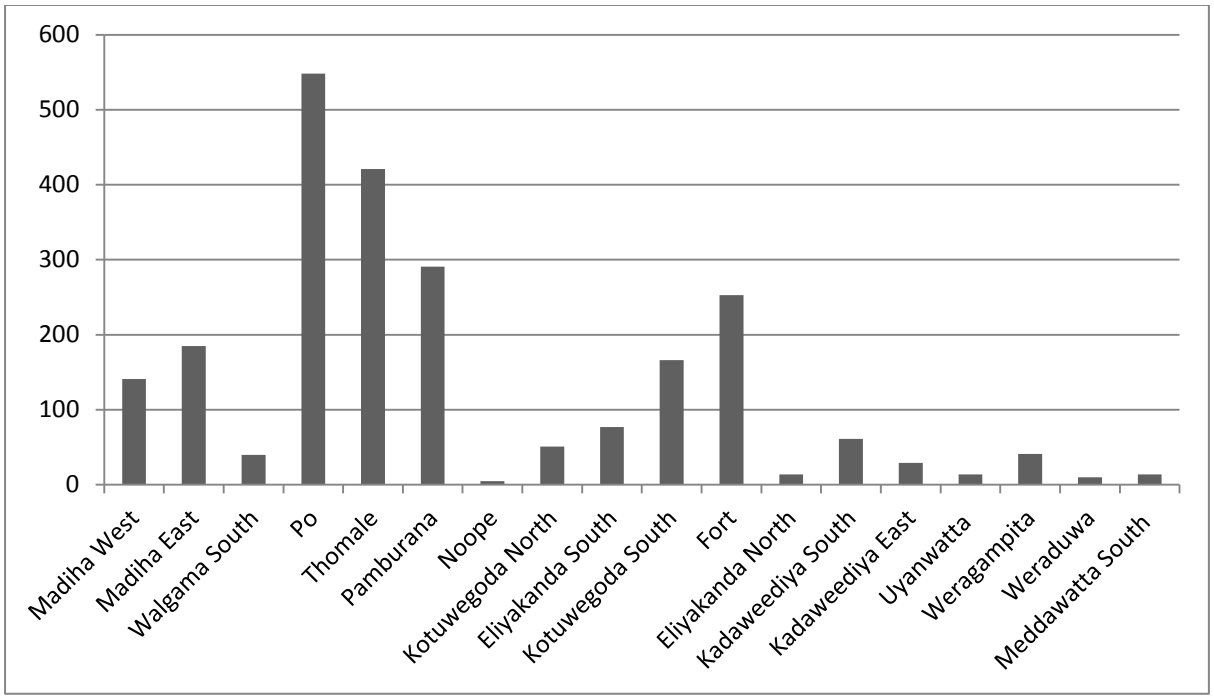

Table 2 Distribution of damaged housing units in the tsunami affected GN divisions: Matara DS Division of Matara District

(Source: adapted from data available in the Department of Census and statistics 2005)

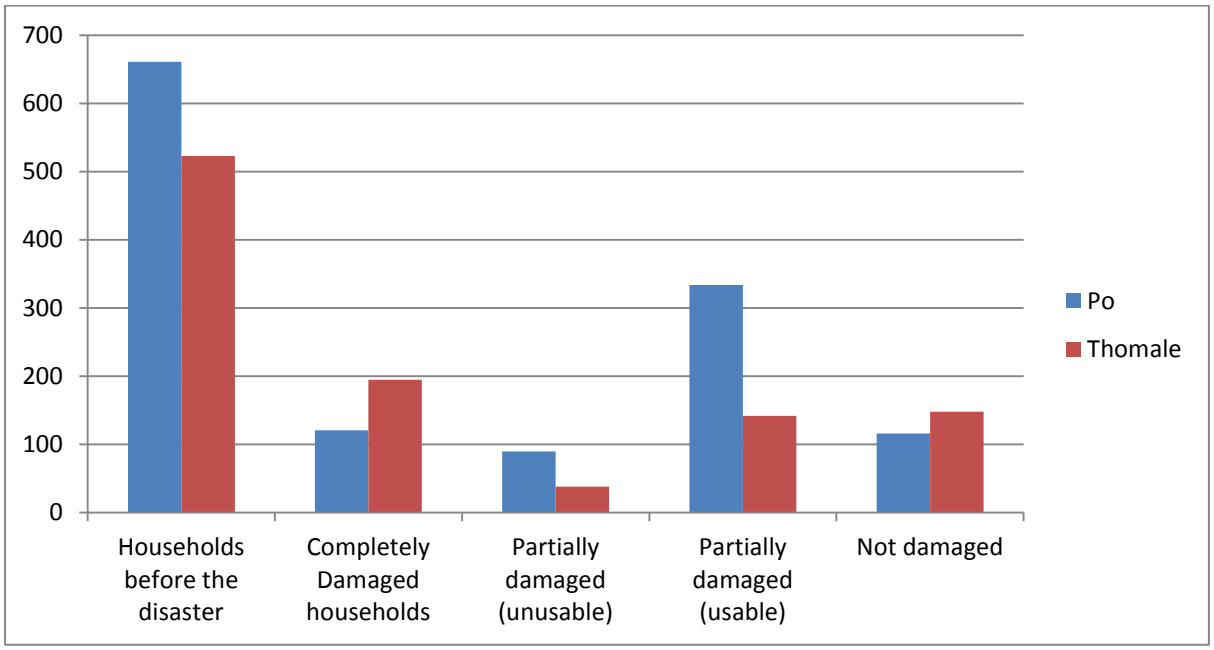

Table 3 Number of households affected by the tsunami disaster in Po and Thomale

(Source: adapted from data available in the Department of Census and statistics 2005)

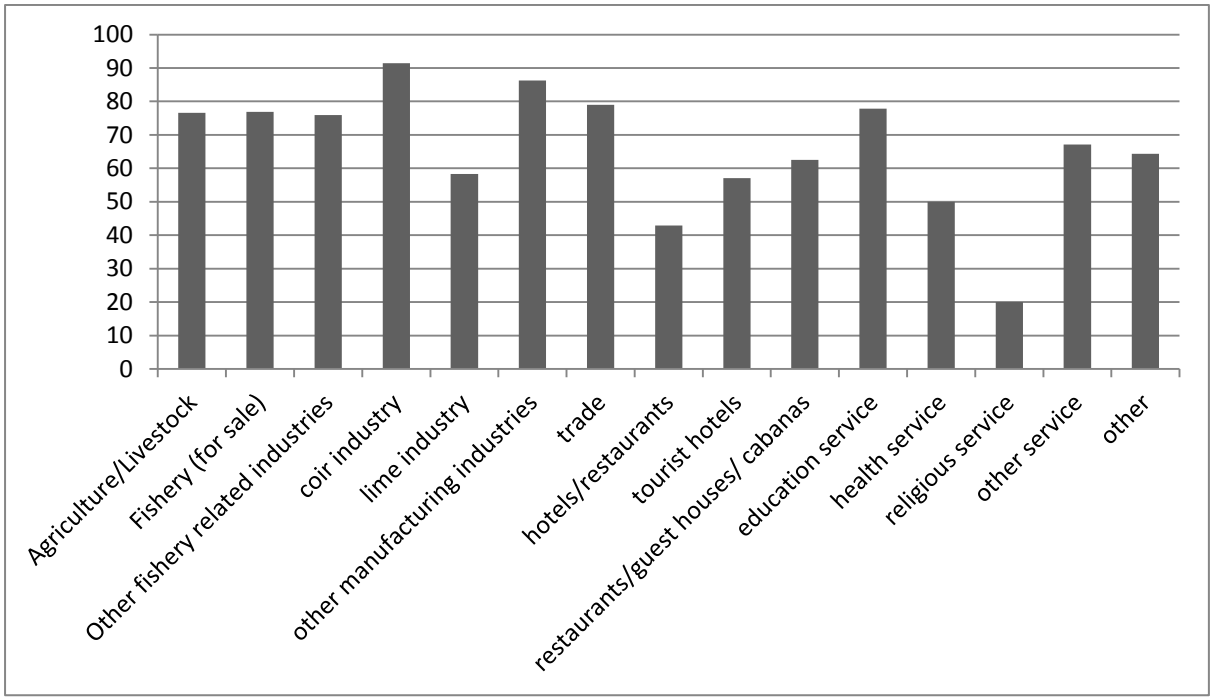

Table 4 Percentage distribution of the damaged housing units in affected DS divisions which operated an economic activity within the unit: Matara District

(Source: adapted from data available in the Department of Census and statistics 2005)

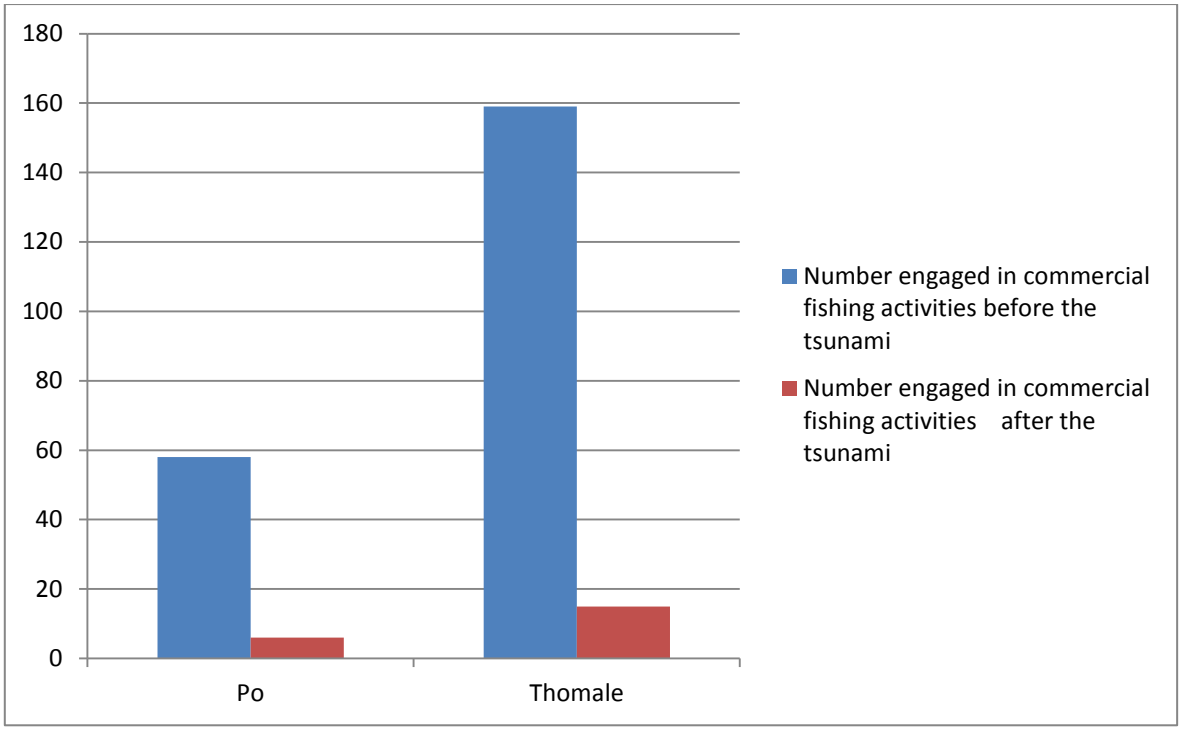

Table 5 The number of people engaged in commercial fishing activities (including sale of aquarium fish) before and after the tsunami.

(Source: adapted from data available in the Department of Census and statistics 2005)

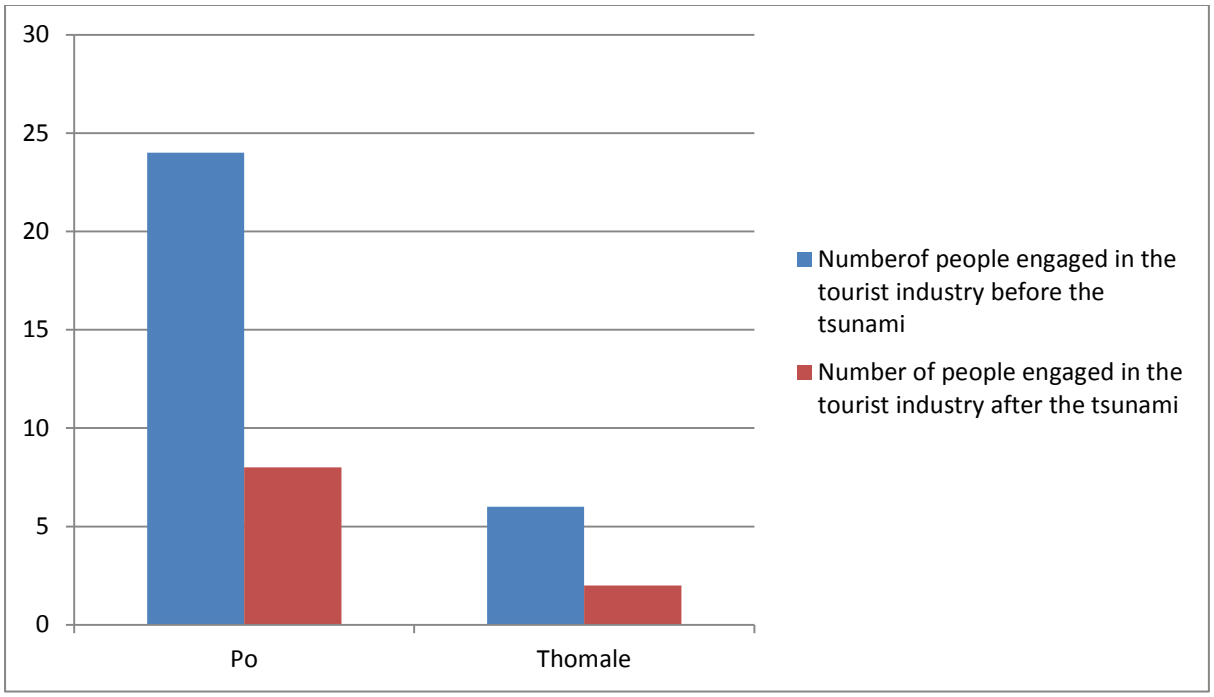

Table 6 A comparison of the people engaged in the tourist industry in Po and Thomale, before and right after the tsunami.

(Source: adapted from data available in the Department of Census and statistics 2005)

Disasters disrupt social networks as well as infrastructure, and the events that follow in their wake remould the social, political, and economic structures of the affected communities. Although post-disaster recovery is initially focused on basic needs, it quickly evolves into a move to further the development of the affected localities (Dyer 1999; Bolin and Stanford 1999; Edwards 1999; Few 2003; Coelho 2005). In the case of Sri Lanka the recovery period set the stage for an intensification of the already historically rooted politics of patronage (Spencer 2007). Disasters are totalising events affecting all members of a community (Tucker 2004), whether they have suffered as a direct consequence or not. In coastal Sri Lanka, patronage in the distribution of aid and through post-disaster assistance was one way in which the effects of the disaster were broadened beyond people directly affected by the tsunami.

Although the tsunami in Sri Lanka was a natural hazard of epic proportions, it was the reconstruction and rebuilding of the ravaged communities in the immediate aftermath that have had enduring effects on the people involved. While the loss of life, property and livelihoods was a cruel blow, it is the outsider-driven policies and developments that have most re-shaped local structures, places and the politics that bind them. This has resulted in an extended aftermath where locals are still negotiating the challenges emerging as a result of this critical event.

Although this thesis is about the politics of place and social relationships in the everyday lives of people following a disaster, I want to begin with two specific aspects of the immediate aftermath that have shaped the nature and structure of relationships in these communities today. On the one hand, I analyse case studies and people's narratives of their experience of the immediate aftermath. Secondly, I look at the effects of the 100 meter buffer-zone, which has probably been the most contentious issue in the post-tsunami rebuilding scenario.

Aftermath

The tsunami ravaged over a thousand kilometres of Sri Lanka's coastline. In a matter of minutes it left over half a million people homeless and killed an estimated 35,000 people. Survivors spent days and, in some cases, weeks, detached from close family members, friends, and neighbours, unaware of who had survived and who had perished. In Po and Thomale, some villagers returned after a few days to find their homes replaced by mounds of rubble and debris, half-submerged in water, and consumed by the overpowering stench of death and decomposition. For weeks after the tsunami, people cleared away rubble, dug through the tangled mess of foliage and debris and continued to find bodies and other remnants of their community. The sheer horror at the extent and magnitude

of death, loss and displacement, was an aspect of the tsunami that remained difficult for locals to overcome long after the event.

However, as Gaasbeek (2010) notes, at a functional and pragmatic level, within the first few weeks following the disaster, survivors had at least been taken into temporary shelters, food rations were being distributed, key roads had been cleared of rubble and basic survival needs were being seen to. The emergency period was over relatively quickly and, for the size and extent of the calamity, it had been dealt with quickly and efficiently in the Matara District.[11] What was to follow was a protracted period of rebuilding and restoring what had been lost (Gaasbeek 2010: 129-131). The financial response to the tsunami on an international level was unparalleled. A total of 14 billion dollars was pledged to the affected countries and between twenty-five and thirty-three per cent of this was destined for Sri Lanka (Tsunami Evaluation Coalition 2006). Aid and development projects were largely concentrated in the southern provinces, and Gamburd writes:

> Because of the southwest coast's proximity to the nation's capital, its high visibility as a foreign tourist zone with luxury hotels, and its political clout at the national level as a Sinhala-majority area, the Southern province was quickly and deeply inundated by a "golden wave" of aid (Gamburd 2014: 6).

Edward Simpson (2013) writes about the myriad possibilities for industrialisation and development created by the 2001 Gujarati earthquake. There the disaster served as a veil, concealing ever so lightly the private intentions and agendas of state officials. He describes how officials used the disaster as a pretext to divert funding towards upgrading and modernising urban Gujarat. In some cases, areas that had not even been shaken by the tremors of the earthquake benefited disproportionately from disaster aid, at times at the expense of the survivors. Similarly, Gunewardena emphasises that policies laid down by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) following the tsunami facilitated the appropriation of coastal land by affluent locals, foreigners and the tourist industry (Gunewardena 2008: 75). The events that followed the disaster drew on opportunities to develop the coastal areas of Sri Lanka. This development brought with it conflicting ideas of how developments should progress and whom they should include. The aftermath was characterised by interactions between people, aid agencies, NGOs, and the state. Simpson explains the aftermath of a disaster as follows:

[11] While aid was quick to reach the southern province of Sri Lanka, the North and East were plagued by delays, lack of aid reaching the area, and a shortage of information exiting the areas. The exact number of people who perished, and infrastructural damage, in the North and East is still unknown (see Frerks and Klem 2005; Gaasbeek 2010).

> Aftermath refers to the second growth or crop in the same season, the new flush of grass after mowing, which is often quite different in its qualities to the first crop, but it is still grass. The second crop may grow unevenly as it races for the light, it may pale before establishing itself. Aftermath is a measure of a quality of time and growth (Simpson 2013:50).

Simpson claims that although a disaster may represent many things, it does not constitute a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate on which a community may be rebuilt afresh, redefined completely, even though the events and actions that supersede it may sometimes suggest otherwise (see also Ruwanpura 2009). Anthony Oliver-Smith, the doyen of disaster studies in anthropology, states that the 'fundamental features' and socio-cultural structures of a community are exposed by the destructive capabilities of a disaster event and by the event itself (Oliver-Smith 1996: 304). In opposition to this, Simpson argues that in fact it is the aftermath that is the most revealing of these features. Simpson goes on to add: 'An aftermath is the product of the longer history of a locality. The world does not implode into the moment of disaster to emerge afresh or ready to be remade in an old way' (ibid. 2013: 53). It is this link between past and present that allows for the negotiation of changes imposed on villagers' communities and the re-establishment of order.

The immediate aftermath – Case Studies

Cases from Po

Lasantha had related his experience of the tsunami to me numerous times over the years. Lasantha was, and still is, an avid diver and snorkeler. He is also something of an authority on fish in that part of Sri Lanka. He kept posters displaying photos and the names of the various species of fish that could be found in the South. He collected the posters from numerous organisations such as Ruhunu University near Matara town, as well as from foreign visitors who passed through the village. Every morning he would wake up early and go snorkelling among the coral reefs, sometimes with the odd tourist, then return and identify the fish they had seen on the various posters adorning his walls.

On the morning of 26th December 2004, he had gone out snorkelling earlier than usual. He was with a German couple who were staying at his brother's guest house (Lasantha had only one room available for guests at the time). The couple were frequent visitors to Sri Lanka and had built up close relations with Lasantha's family. They had planned a trip out of the village that day and had asked Lasantha if he could take them snorkelling earlier than was normal for him. He opened his eyes wide every time he related this detail. It was, as if realising the fact just then, he would exclaim, 'they saved my life, otherwise I am dead for sure'. An Italian friend of his, Sergio, would also sometimes join Lasantha for a snorkel. Sergio lived at Sunil's (Lasantha's brother) guest house and

had been living in Sri Lanka for five years. He passed by that morning but since Lasantha had already been out with the German couple, Sergio opted to go snorkelling alone and borrowed a pair of Lasantha's goggles and snorkel. That was the last time Lasantha saw him alive. He explained how he had been alone at home with his eldest daughter that morning. His wife and youngest daughter had gone out to the shop and he was cleaning his diving equipment in the garden. At around nine in the morning he heard a series of screams coming from the beach, followed by a loud crash. As he peered out of his garden gate, he saw a wall of water moving towards him. At this point in the story, he would pause and say, 'I still don't know how I moved so quickly, I can't even remember how it happened. Sometimes I forget, then I think I go crazy'. He managed to grab his daughter and ran through to the back of his house. He kept running and didn't look back, till he passed the main road, and then ran some more, until he managed to hitch a ride in a truck laden with people, just as distraught, to a temple further inland. Throughout the day, he said scores of people kept arriving at the temple. He was afraid and tried to comfort his daughter. He said that it felt like the world was coming to an end. He told me:

> I feel a lot of shame [*lajjawa*] then, I forget my wife and my other daughter. But I thought all of Sri Lanka finished for sure. Then people said the water had stopped and many were dead, and then I cried because I thought my family is dead for sure. We slept at the temple, there were many people, all on the floor. The next day we went back down. I went to one cousin's home – he was very happy to see me, he thought I was dead. I left my daughter there and went to look for my family. Everywhere in Po was full of water. The sea came more than one kilometre inland. All houses were finished and many dead. There were many people from inland coming to steal what they can. Then I met Asanka (his younger brother), and he told me my wife and daughter were staying at a friend's home. From our family no one died. Asanka saw the sea coming, that time it took his clothes away. He was naked and he climbed a coconut tree, but he was naked. That's how he survived.

Saran, Lasantha's wife told me that she also thought that Lasantha had died. She had managed to get herself and her daughter to another inland temple with the aid of a neighbour who had pulled her daughter out of the water. It is significant to note that this neighbour was a member of an extended family that have long been rivals of Lasantha and his extended family. Saran told me privately that Lasantha had become a lot more caring and considerate since the tsunami and thought that he felt guilty for running inland and forgetting her. She was right to an extent. He told me how he felt he had neglected his duty to protect his family. The tsunami had plunged his world into chaos and for him that chaos was in part represented by his inability to perform what to him

was a key social role. The tsunami had caused him to forget and abandon his role as a husband and father; it appeared to make him question his sense of self.

The disaster created chaos across the nation. It dissolved traditional and culturally embedded structures and, as Oliver-Smith (1996) has noted for disasters more generally, exposed the strengths and weaknesses of the societies involved. Apart from my informants, many researchers have noted the sense of community solidarity and altruism that followed the tsunami (cf. Oliver-Smith 1999; Bankoff 2003; De Silva and Yamao 2007; Gunewardena 2008; Ruwanpura 2009; Simpson 2013; Gamburd 2014). It is, I posit, this sense of communal solidarity in the aftermath that represents an attempt to re-knit social relationships and rebuild the community. The disorder created by the disaster event: death, destruction, looting, and amnesia forces community members to take stock of the changes and attempt to re-establish normalcy. Thus, as Simpson claims it is the aftermath, rather than the disaster event itself, that is truly revealing of the dynamics and architecture of social relationships and community structures.

Two other important aspects emerge from Lasantha's narrative, aspects that he has emphasised at each retelling. The first is his claim to be unable to remember how he escaped the wave and his assertion that at times he thought he was going crazy. The use of the word crazy [*pissu*] in Sinhalese often denotes a situation where someone acts abnormally or in a disorderly fashion. Gamburd (2008) in fact provides examples of its use with people who are habitual drinkers in southern Sri Lanka. In the case of Lasantha the use of the term *pissu* indicates that the tsunami made him act abnormally and discard normal social behaviour. The tsunami created a situation that was beyond his control and, 'craziness' here reflects a loss of that control. The latter is also reflected in Simpson's observations regarding the earthquake in Gujarat where, '[m]oments of catastrophe influence the ways in which people know the world and what its certainties are. These experiences have fed into social life in the aftermath, perhaps as an antidote to ambivalence …'(Simpson 2013: 20). The second aspect that is of note is Lasantha pointing out his brother's nakedness, as well as that of others caught in the wave (a point which will be brought out again in another case study later in this section). Lasantha, as well as other villagers, have described to me the pathetic image of nudity and helplessness. Men and women were clinging to trees and on rooftops. They were stripped bare and exposed to their neighbours, friends, family, daily acquaintances and those who were sent to rescue them. In a different context, Francesca Bremner (2004) describes the scenes of public humiliation of Tamils by members of the army, where women were stripped and men were forcedly dressed as women and whipped through the streets following the events of 'Black July' 1983. She writes:

> These rituals of humiliation unfolded on the very street that these men had possessed as their own. Their masculinity and sense of entitlement through nationhood were parodied as state actors attempted to invert the meanings and entitlements these men claimed (2004: 147).

Whilst Bremner provides examples of humiliation of locals by state actors (the army), Lasantha and his brothers described scenes of shared humiliation following the tsunami. Villagers suffered loss, pain and humiliation whilst some of their neighbours escaped unscathed. Relations within the community between those affected by the disaster and those unaffected were fundamentally altered. Francesca Bremner follows up her example by describing the momentary unity between Sinhalese and Tamils in the village of Apee Gama. Her informants described how they have a love for the nation because they are poor and the poor are connected in pain. Bremner's example is in some ways illustrative of the feeling of solidarity and understanding between victims of the tsunami – exposed to the scrutiny of international media. Coastal Sri Lankans were portrayed as vulnerable, naked and frail and this image became representative of the imaginary Westerners had of them as a result of the tsunami (see Frerks and Klem 2005, Gunewardena 2008).

In another narrative, Chaminda, a close friend and cross-cousin of Lasantha's, spoke of his experiences in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami. Chaminda related how he and his cousin Donald returned to the beach area with a boat to see if they could rescue anybody. The waters were still high and there were bodies floating and people stranded in coconut palm trees. Many were injured and had had their clothes ripped off by the wave. The waters were still rising. They steered the boat towards a tree in which five women were clinging for their lives. They brought them onto the boat and took them to safety. This was very good for their *karma,* Lasantha had remarked, even though the women disappeared and never sought to thank them. Later that day, Donald ventured down again without the boat and dragged a German man to safety. The man was unconscious, so Donald carried him to the hospital and waited by his side till he woke. He introduced himself as the man who had saved him. The German looked away and said with a grunt, 'So you want money now?' Offended, Donald got up and left his side and three months later he heard the man had died from his injuries, with no one by his side. Donald told me, 'That is also *karma*'. Crosby notes with reference to local perceptions of events related to the tsunami:

> For all of them, other factors, especially bad *kamma* or some connection with individual or collective human faults such as angered gods or the decline in the *dhamma*, had also to be at work to explain why some were killed and others not (Crosby 2008: 60-61).

She further notes:

> It is a common misapprehension that all forms of Buddhism view all events in terms of the previous individual actions (*kamma*) in this or a former lifetime of those affected by such events. Theravada Buddhism posited a theory that events are restricted by a range of constraints (*niyama*) inclusive of, but broader than, *kamma*. These *niyama* determine possible patterns for the unfolding of events and explain why causality is not random (Crosby 2008: 59).

Both Gamburd (2014) and Crosby (2008) have recorded statements by survivors of the tsunami who believed the disaster was a form of pre-ordained 'karmic justice'. In some cases, it was believed that the fisheries industry was in part responsible and that's why the coastal communities were mainly affected. In the case of Lasantha and other villagers, they blamed the war and the increase in corruption. However, as evidenced by Chaminda's narrative, there was a conscious need to portray themselves as being selfless and ethical and, rather than taking advantage of the chaos and the temporary abandonment of rules and social structure, they engaged in highly meritorious actions. Chaminda and Asanka (Lasantha's younger brother) also explained that while villagers had fled inland to temples and other safe spots, inland youths had descended on the village, looting and desecrating bodies for jewellery and other valuables. While the communities affected by the disordering effect of the tsunami attempted to recreate order out of the chaos through acts of sociality and solidarity, some of those that had not been affected descended on the village to become part of the chaos, such that the boundaries of normalcy became unidentifiable.

> Reports said corpses piling up at the hospital were being snatched by human vultures who later demanded large sums of money from relatives claiming they found the bodies at great risk to their own lives. People were also snatching any valuables left on the thousands of rotting corpses. Some gangs are reportedly demanding up to Rs. 10,000 to find bodies (Sri Lankan Daily Mirror, January 1st, 2005).

Lasantha highlighted that none of their family members died. He took this as a sign of their moral superiority, yet also as a way of creating order out of the chaos and destruction. There was a point and a reason for the tsunami, a moral cleansing of the land, from which he and his family members were all spared.

Cases from Thomale

For much of the time that I was working in Sri Lanka in 2005, 2006 and 2008, a considerable amount was spent teaching English and training teachers at a school for deaf children. Whilst there, I learned Sinhalese sign language and began a friendship with Lakmal, a young deaf man from

Thomale. He told me of his experience of the tsunami and its aftermath. I reproduce his account verbatim and at length:

> At the time I was eighteen. The night before I had a small party at home with some other deaf friends. We ate and later we went to the beach to sit and stare at the stars. We felt lazy and happy. I went home at midnight and slept. At five the next morning my father woke me up to go to the temple, since it was Poya day (full moon). As I was dressing I felt something tremble. When we got home I had a cup of tea and watched the cricket game, the tea cup started to tremble, I looked out but there was nothing. I finished breakfast and waited for my friends, they said they would come but they didn't. One of my friends ran to door, he said, 'the sea is coming, the sea is coming!' I said, 'You're lying, you're lying', but when I looked out I saw people running, their mouths open and screaming and the sea behind them moving in and rising. I saw my brother helping an elderly couple. I ran out, but a falling tree bashed me on the shoulder, I tried running but my feet were getting stuck. I shouted for help and as my friend was reaching out to me, a wave bashed me against the wall and the next thing I knew I was clinging to a tree and my friend was clinging on to me.
>
> The water came in over me and I continued to hold on, trying to breathe. I was worried about my family and friends and I was shaking. Trees and parts of houses were floating, there was debris everywhere and I could see where my house used to be. I hung on, shivering with cold. I looked around and saw people up trees and many dead. Many people had their clothes ripped off by the waves. I was only wearing a sarong and started wading through the water looking for some clothes, I found a shirt.
>
> The water started moving again, it was the second wave. I ran and as I ran I couldn't stop thinking about all the dead people I saw and I began to feel faint. I was continuously worried about my family. My friend and I helped an elderly couple to safety and began to look for others. My legs were hurting. I took my shirt off and gave it to a girl who had lost all her clothes. I walked on and my head felt scrambled. We walked for a long time, until we got to a friend's house. I washed and noticed blood dripping from my mouth and face. I was worried about my family and felt shame that I had left them. I found my mother and comforted her. The water began moving again, so we got into a three-wheeler and drove to the temple. We couldn't go back into town, it was still too dangerous. I found that I couldn't eat, but was feeling faint.

The next day we tried to go into Matara but the police wouldn't let us, they were scared of another wave. I was very weak. People tried to give me clothes but I wouldn't take them, I am not a beggar. We went inland to Deniyaya and slept there. From there I tried to go to Galle to see my girlfriend and friends, but they wouldn't allow anyone in. We couldn't take the coast road to go back, it was littered with dead bodies. We eventually returned to Matara and finally I found my father sitting next to some broken trees where our house used to be. We hugged each other and cried. Close by I saw a dead woman with her dead baby, I didn't want to see that, I was horrified.

Two weeks later, some deaf friends told me that some organisations were donating money and houses. They were still finding dead bodies under rubble and in the vegetation. There was a smell of death and decomposition everywhere. We had to list everything we had lost and the organisations took photos of the site where our house used to be. The school remained closed till February. When I went back to school I had only one set of clothes. A Muslim deaf friend gave his clothes to the students affected by tsunami.

Everyone at school was running around and playing, but I couldn't, I couldn't feel happy, I couldn't forget what had happened. I couldn't concentrate at school, I forgot how to do the simplest things, how to read and write. Tsunami made me forget a lot of things and I felt shy and ashamed. I had to copy work down to remember. My girlfriend would sit down with me and help me write things down. In 2006 I started to feel ok again, I attended a healing ceremony at the temple to try and forget Tsunami.

I began to forget the tsunami little by little because I was meeting new people. Foreigners were coming to the school to help, they helped rebuild the school, they were friendly and a few of them learnt sign and talked to us. Most of the students' parents can't sign, so that was special.

In 2006 we were still waiting for the house promised to us, but we didn't get one. The following year, in 2007, we still hadn't received a house, the government hadn't given us anything and my mum was worried. I wanted to help but I couldn't because I was still in school. I began to feel lonely again and lazy. I was always feeling tired and couldn't do anything, couldn't participate in any activities. Then a foreign deaf boy, Adam, came to the school and helped me, he made me go to school, participate again and taught me new things.

When asked about foreigners and the distribution of aid, he said:

> The foreigners gave the government money, but they know that governments misuse it. One Australian man gave money for a house to be built in Galle and then filmed it on TV. But the person who's house it was supposed to be had been killed, so people said he was lying, he was keeping the money himself. The foreigners didn't know who needed the money, but at least they tried to help. The government knew who needed help but they kept the information and money for themselves.

With reference to the latter point Gamburd has also noted the following:

> The people with whom I spoke expected foreigners to act fairly because foreigners lacked local connections and had enough wealth to disdain embezzlement. But without knowing the local population, a donor could not determine who had been affected by the tsunami (2014: 161).

As opposed to Lasantha and Chaminda's narratives, Lakmal's experiences of the immediate aftermath were marked by feelings of despair and later, anger. Lakmal's story is typical of the experience of most residents of Thomale. Most of the people from Thomale that I talked to, saw themselves as having been side-lined in favour of other localities where there were more opportunities for outsiders' investment in the tourist industry. Many felt betrayed by the government, and lacked representation at the local level. Lakmal felt twice cheated, first by the wave for taking away his home and then by the government and the NGOs for profiting from their misfortune. Some people in Thomale and Po who had relations with affluent persons in the town of Matara or who were in some way connected to the NGOs, entered into patron-client relations to ensure the fast delivery of aid (see also Gamburd 2014: 162-164). All of the latter eventually led to a situation dominated by jealousy and suspicion between recipients and non-recipients of aid. It also led to the people located on the outer fringes of the privileged circle of aid recipients to feel outcast and excluded.

A number of important points emerge from Lakmal's narrative. As with other narratives of the tsunami, the dominating images are of death and decay, the overpowering stench, the nudity and helplessness and a land stripped bare. Like Lasantha he felt shame at having left his family behind and felt shy and ashamed at having forgotten how to perform the simplest of tasks. Perhaps the most significant statement in Lakmal's account concerns dress: 'People tried to give me clothes but I wouldn't take them, I am not a beggar', coupled with his description of handing his shirt to a woman whose clothes had been washed away. Although some people received aid and donations without it being an issue, for others receiving aid was much more problematic. As Gamburd also notes:

'Ashamed of the image of Sri Lankans as beggars, my interlocutors created a middle-class status by describing themselves as gift givers rather than gift receivers' (Gamburd 2014: 138). The latter is also reflected in a separate conversation with Lakmal, where he explains that after they finally received a house, the house given was not as well constructed or as large as their previous home. Lakmal emphasised that they had a good house before, that help received was not good enough and they would break it down and build their own home. He seemed eager to establish that they were not 'beggars', and that in the end they got their current home through their own work.

In another case, Sampath, a full-time fisherman in his early forties from Thomale, described how he was mending his nets at his waterfront home when the tsunami hit. It crushed him against an outer wall and a rock carried by the waves then crushed his leg, resulting in a permanent limp. Somehow he managed to haul himself out of the waters and onto the roof of a half-destroyed house and using his sarong he managed to pull his wife to safety. Two of his neighbours rushed to their aid and carried them away before the next wave arrived. His home, boat, and everything else he owned had been completely washed away in an instant. His wife was in hospital for six months with a back injury and he had to have his leg operated on and was out of action for months after. Sampath spent almost three years in an IDP camp. In 2007 he was given a house in a tsunami housing estate two kilometres inland. It was five kilometres from where he originally kept his boat. He explained the difficulties of being away from the sea, the cost of commuting to and from Thomale on a daily basis and the increased competition from more boats being at sea as a result of boat donations to non-fishing communities. The most difficult situation, he said, was being separated from family, friends and the village he grew up in. De Silva and Yamao writing about social relations and kinship in fishing communities following the tsunami, note a similar situation to that reported by Sampath:

> Traditionally, local fishing communities have had strong community bonds and helped each other in their day-to-day fishing activities. There is a risk that this community bond may be disrupted if the relocation and resettlement is not managed diligently and with due attention to the associated socioeconomic implications of the policy (De Silva and Yamao 2007: 401).

Like Lakmal, Sampath felt side-lined by his government. He also noted that popular tourist hotspots such as Po and Mirissa had been favoured making his own connections with the aid received and their potential for tourist-oriented development. He remarked how, although he had received a house, this was only made possible through the aid of organisations and not through the government. He emphasised how the government did not 'care about fishermen'. It seemed to him

that many had benefited from the wave of aid and donations, bar, that is, the 'real victims' of the tsunami. Ruwanpura writes in this regard:

> where permanent relocation and resettlement barred communities from effectively engaging in their livelihoods or simply returning to a state of normalcy, their sense of injustice was aggravated by the belief that capitalist interests were overriding the needs and priorities of affected communities (Ruwanpura 2009: 449).

In this sub-section I have talked about how local experiences and narratives of the tsunami and the immediate aftermath bring to light both the short and long term effects of the tsunami disaster. These narratives elucidate the sense of helplessness and exposure wrought by the tsunami, as it ripped through their communities, and inverted people's sense of an ordered and secure daily life. In Lasantha' account there is a sense of moral superiority in the actions of family members, evident in Lasantha's emphasis of the fact that all his family and extended family members survived. In short, there was a belief that the disaster was a form of karmic justice from which they were spared. In the case of Lakmal and Sampath, the narratives focused on the shared feeling among locals in Thomale of having been side-lined and taken advantage of. Their vulnerability and their helplessness following the tsunami was felt to be further heightened by the actions of their Government. Gamburd notes that one flaw in the concept of vulnerability, is the assumption of powerlessness and lack of agency that it carries with it (Gamburd 2014: 7). While the affected communities may indeed be defined by certain structural, social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities, the people at their centre most certainly did not lack agency. What I demonstrate throughout this thesis is how tsunami-affected communities, subjected to heavy losses as well as to intense post-disaster development efforts, have in some cases negotiated these changes to their advantage. Having presented local experiences of the tsunami, in the next section I provide an overview of the 100 metre buffer-zone rule and how it affected coastal communities. This section lays the groundwork for understanding how locals negotiated the resultant developments emerging from the 100 metre policy, and shows in turn how they actively engaged with this policy.

The 100 metre Buffer-Zone

Stirrat notes that the effects of the Sri Lankan tsunami differentiated it from other disasters because of its 'ribbon destruction' along the coast, as opposed to the typical 'centralised destruction' which characterises most disasters (Stirrat 2006: 11). Communities along the coastline experienced

patches of devastation, where within the same village one could find completely destroyed houses and right beside them properties that had remained largely unscathed. Similarly, wreckage could be seen up to a kilometre inland, whereas life beyond and around that area was largely unaffected. For some households it was a case of living in the midst of disaster, yet at the same time being detached from it. This was a situation that further complicated the relief efforts of NGOs in the area. On the one hand, the targeted area was too large and porous. There were very few means for identifying who the real victims were. NGOs had to rely on what locals told them and often prominent local individuals on the ground were able to divert aid away from tsunami victims in favour of their own allies and family members. Another factor impeding the smooth running of relief efforts was the sheer number of organisations and individuals operating in the area and the substantial amounts of aid money being pumped into the affected zones. It was evident that the competition between organisations was fierce, with NGOs scrambling to lay claim to particular areas in order to utilise their budgets as quickly as possible. The result of this scramble was that duplication took place and identical projects were carried out in the same areas (ibid. 2006).

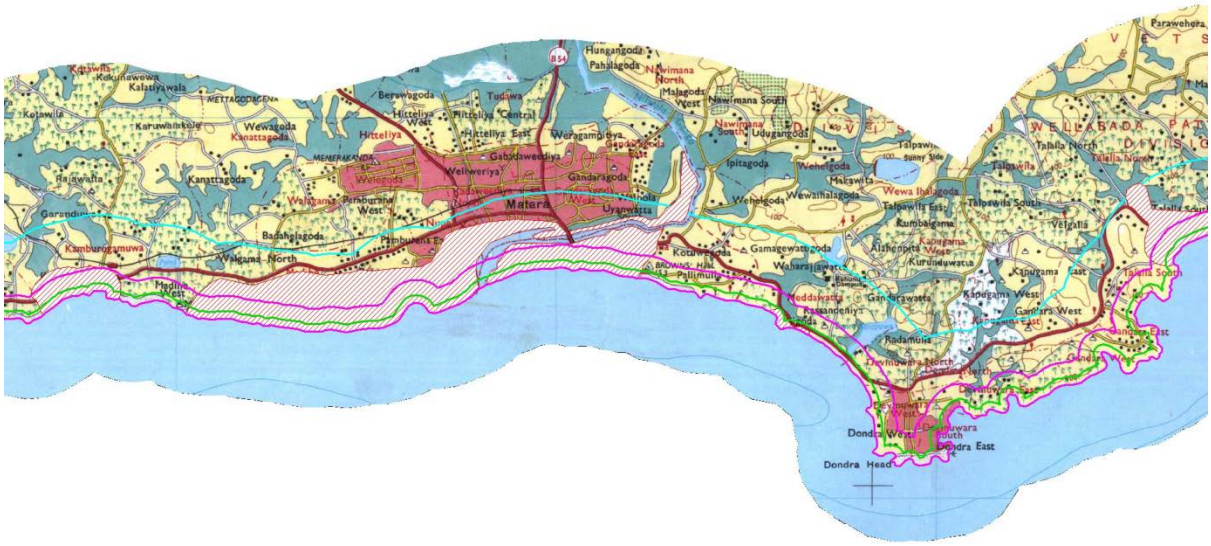

Figure 7 Depicting the 'ribbon destruction' of the tsunami in Matara district. The green line shows the 100 metre mark, and the purple behind it the 300 metre mark, whilst the blue line is the 1 kilometre mark (UDA GIS Division, January 2005).

Perhaps the most contentious issue in the reconstruction strategy was the imposition of buffer-zones in which the rebuilding and repairing of houses was not permitted. This ruling cast doubt on whether families would be able to return to their homes and family land. This move added considerably to the atmosphere of uncertainty faced by those affected by the tsunami. The buffer-zones were established at 100metres from the coast, then reduced to an area of 35 – 55meters in the beginning of 2006 (Vaes and Goddeeris 2012: 4; Kuhn 2010: 46). The newspaper extract below,

taken from a Sri Lankan English language newspaper and published less than two weeks after the tsunami disaster, illustrates the reasons given for the setting up of buffer-zones.

> The government has decided to declare the land area 100 metres from the coast as a reservation. Chairman of the Urban Development Authority, Gemunu Silva said that the construction of new buildings and effecting repairs to existing buildings in that reservation will be strictly prohibited. As such permission will not be granted to repair houses, hotels or any other buildings in this area destroyed by tsunami disaster. He said that housing schemes will be started for the victims in the interior of the country. However the housing schemes of fisheries families will be located close to these zones.
>
> On inquiry, the UDA Chairman said that houses and tourist hotels remaining intact after tidal waves will also have to be removed as they are likely to be in danger in future. (Sri Lankan Daily Mirror, January 03, 2005)

Most families that had lost their houses remained in IDP camps for up to two years after the tsunami and, in some cases, for longer. The situation was made all the more tense as the restrictions on the building of tourist hotels and small business enterprises, such as restaurants, were largely ignored, as numerous new structures were erected on land only metres from the beach in popular tourist areas (see also Frerks and Klem 2005; Hyndman 2007; Gunewardena 2008; Leckie 2005). The people living in IDP camps were constantly fearful that their land would be appropriated and they would lose their place in the village.

For those villagers remaining in the village and who had not lost their homes, the tsunami represented a significant opportunity. They were able to capitalise on the aid finding its way into their localities and establish their own development and reconstruction projects. It was also an opportunity to increase their own influence and authority within the area by aligning themselves with foreigners, NGOs and their projects. Other families had lost relatives and property and found themselves without networks of support or power and influence within the community. As Gunewardena notes: 'The loss of extended family members has exacted an emotional toll that is compounded by their increased economic insecurity, given the loss of support generally extended through kinship networks – a key to their long term survival' (Gunewardena 2008: 78).

The imposition of the 100 metre buffer-zone allowed the tourist industry and outside entrepreneurs with an interest in developing their businesses in the area, a free hand in the acquisition of coastal land. The construction that followed along the coast consisted of new guest houses, boutique hotels, restaurants and large private villas for foreign expats who began moving into the area in

significant numbers from between late 2007 and early 2008.[12] Gamburd identifies three factors for the transfer of coastal land from locals to outsiders. First, was the availability, for some, of new homes inland. Second, was the changing buffer-zone regulations (reduction of the 100 metre rule), in the case of victims who had waited patiently for homes in their old villages. Third, was the 'uncertain financial support for rebuilding', caused by reliance on NGOs for money rather than on the government. The result was that owners affected by the tsunami and falling in the buffer-zone sold their land, exasperated by a lack of certainty (Gamburd 2014: 75-76). Gamburd asserts that: 'Political pressure and lack of land reduced the buffer zone to a bare minimum, while wealthy individuals and hotel corporations eagerly eyed newly available beachside property' (Gamburd 2014: 76).

Leckie points out that, 'the tsunami provided a pretext for evictions, land grabs, unjustifiable land-acquisition plans and other measures designed to prevent homeless residents from returning to their original homes and lands' (Leckie 2005: 15). The void created by the buffer-zone and the subsequent alienation of coastal land from local residents resulted in a replication at the level of property ownership of the damage wrought by the tsunami. In this section, I have briefly summarised the details of the 100 metre buffer-zone and how it has affected locals. In the next section I will look at how this policy has affected locals of Po and Thomale in more detail, as well as the strategies locals have developed to counteract or benefit from the resultant development in their areas.

Gunewardena states, 'the end result of the 100 meter rule is a reshaping of the local social and cultural landscape as prized coastal zones are usurped by the tourism industry' (Gunewardena 2008: 87). Development in this context is reminiscent of what Schuller, with reference to Naomi Klein (2005; 2007), refers to as 'disaster capitalism' in which catastrophe is used as a tool for the promotion of 'neoliberal capitalist interests' (Schuller 2008: 20). Lasantha and other locals spoke of how the 100 metre restrictions combined with the uneven distribution of aid was being used to oust locals from their land and encourage official Tourist board recognised business enterprises from outside the area.

[12] From 2005 till mid-2008 the number of expats owning land directly or indirectly in Po increased from just 3 to 8, and by October 2008 had increased to 10 with a number of local properties being rented out by expats for a number of months [taken from field-notes in October 2008]. Properties owned by expats in the neighbouring village of Madagama had increased from 2 in 2006 to 17 in 2012.

Developing 'paradise' after the Asian tsunami

Although equally affected by the wave, the villages of Po and Thomale received unequal degrees of aid and assistance. Po, with its scenic coastline, wide open spaces, and the odd remnant of colonial architecture concealed within foliage-ridden nooks, represented a cradle for investment. Po was especially suited for outsider investment, as a site imbued with all the characteristics that conformed Western images of an ideal tropical setting. Thomale, on the other hand, is a stretch of intersecting broken pathways running along a crocodile-infested riverbank and flanked at its other end by a ridge of jagged rocks and murky brown sea frothing violently at their base. Half of the village is an extended fish market where the ground is strewn with entrails and the air suffused with the lingering odour of fish and any other scents that this busy end of the river donated. The fact that the large majority of families in Thomale are headed by fishermen, has allowed it to remain somewhat walled in as a community. Geographically and socially it is bounded and distinct, which is further aided by the dominant perception among Sinhalese in nearby localities, including the major towns. Fishermen it would seem are prone to violence and excessive drinking, and unpredictability, and thus to be avoided. With certain forms of livelihoods, such as fishing, drinking is assumed to have an essential and inseparable social function. As a result, most agencies and NGOs in the area post-tsunami that were looking to establish a base and projects turned their focus on the potential of Po at the expense of Thomale's poor geography and bad reputation.

It would appear that the post-tsunami recovery period benefitted the tourist industry more than village economies. Apart from the buffer-zone, a 'duty free importation scheme' (Gunewardena 2008: 75) for materials required to restart or upgrade their businesses, afforded the tourist industry uncontested claims to coastal space. Unable to utilise the housing aid available to them to rebuild their homes along the coast, many displaced families felt pressured to accept houses in housing projects outside their villages, in many cases quite a distance from their original localities. Thwarted by the inability to rebuild their old homes, and in some cases owing to fear of another tsunami, numerous families sold their coastal land in the initial months following the disaster for much less than its actual worth. Much of this land was bought up and developed by entrepreneurs attached to the tourist industry. The increased availability of coastal land also saw an increase in the development of plots by foreigners for the construction of holiday properties and luxury homes.

The buffer-zone was eventually reduced from 100metres to 35metres in early 2006 in the Matara district (Vaes and Goddeeris 2012: 4; Kuhn 2010: 46). Some locals who had accepted houses further inland had held on to their plots of land in their villages in the hope that at some point in the future

the government's policy would change and maybe by then they would have the capital to rebuild their old homes (Gamburd 2014). In 2005 and 2006 I was working with an NGO in the village of Po, a village of just over 600 households. By mid-2006 a foreign couple and an elderly Swedish man had purchased plots of coastal land in Po and began building houses. By the time I returned in 2008 for a six month stretch of fieldwork, the number of foreign owned houses had increased by five and another four houses were being rented out by foreigners at exorbitant rates by Sri Lankan standards. Locals who owned coastal land had identified the economic benefits of selling their land to foreigners searching for their piece of paradise. Kravanja (2012) writing about conceptions of paradise in southern Sri Lanka states that 'Paradise serves as a powerful trope for discovering and then experiencing the perfect place where one can escape from the banal existence we live on a daily basis' (2012: 180). He notes that many tourists travel to Sri Lanka in search of an ideal and 'unspoiled destination' but are quickly disappointed by the manufactured element of the 'exotic' reproduced by locals for the benefit of the tourist – and travellers quickly take their search elsewhere. Similarly, MacClancy (2010) notes that the search for paradise often results in disappointment for many tourists and backpackers seeking the authentic local setting, untouched by the outside world. Whilst Crick (1991: 12-13) states that in their search for the 'Other', the exciting and the different, tourists still feel the need to keep that safe distance and have some control over the encounter. The development of tropical paradise homes in coastal Sri Lanka may be one way to effect that control. Unlike the typical traveller or backpacker described by Kravanja, the expatriates I encountered were considerably older and possessed enough capital to purchase land and design a home that adhered to their imagined ideal of what a tropical paradise should resemble. Thus, instead of searching for paradise they attempted to create it and by creating it they controlled it. The post-tsunami scenario offered favourable conditions for the accomplishment of such projects.

The sale of coastal land to foreigners had by 2008 become a profitable business for some local entrepreneurs in Po. Most of these entrepreneurs were already inserted in the tourist industry in one way or another, either as guest house owners, diving instructors or small tour operators. A number of local entrepreneurs acted as brokers between locals who wanted to sell their land and the foreigners who wanted to purchase and develop that land. By 2008 they had also begun to engage local architects and masons to design and build homes for the foreigners they met. Through trial and error, local entrepreneurs learned to identify what foreigners were looking for in terms of a home and how to best promote their locality to them. In Po, locals who owned guest houses were in regular contact with foreigners, and attempted to entice them into buying land in the village or one of the neighbouring villages where their network of contacts extended to. In many cases, potential buyers cultivated a close relationship with their local brokers who even hosted them for free at their

establishments or homes for the duration of their stay whilst they viewed the available plots of land. In other cases, some foreigners were suspicious of their hosts and contracted outsiders to locate land for them. In this way, they immediately alienated their future neighbours.

There were obvious advantages to having a local broker to aid in the acquisition of land. Under Part VI of the Finance Act No. 11 of 1963, as amended in 2004 (Parliament of Sri Lanka 2004), approved foreign companies or individuals were allowed to purchase land in Sri Lanka subject to a hundred per cent tax on the value of the property. While some foreigners had the capital and contacts available to purchase land under these conditions, most utilised the close friendships they developed with local brokers to register the property under their broker's name and avoid the taxes that came with the purchase. In the case of foreigners who built holiday homes, the property would be vacant for long periods of the year. Local brokers were allowed to rent out the property to tourists and keep the profits, in exchange for taking care of the maintenance of the properties. Since brokers in Po were usually prominent local figures at the village level, registration of the property with them ensured its security from damage or looting. Brokers maintained close relationships with expatriates recognising that they would serve as character references for other foreigners intent on purchasing property in the same manner. Some locals even partnered in business with their foreign friends.

The post-tsunami also saw the acquisition of land by local entrepreneurs from other localities. Most of these entrepreneurs were from affluent areas of Sri Lanka like Matara and Galle town and had significant capital to start off their new businesses. These entrepreneurs were not dependent on locals to purchase land and in some cases there was animosity between outside entrepreneurs and locals as a result of conflicting ideas and goals in their development projects. In the next section I provide a case study that illustrates how the politics of patronage between local community members and outside local entrepreneurs works in practice.

Patronage and aid

Development aid has been recognised as a resource to be controlled, as well a resource that *controls* (Gardner and Lewis 1996; Gunawardena 2008; Mawdsley 2012; Mosse 2013). In other words aid is closely bound up with questions of power and politics. As Spencer says of Sri Lanka:

> Politics is not about morality, it is about resources. Village politics are all about patronage, about getting government jobs and loans, contracts and favours. This is how villagers see politics, and few analysts would disagree with them (Spencer 2007: 85-86).

In this section I look at an example of the disbursement of aid in the aftermath of the tsunami and describe how this impacted upon social relations at the village level in Po.

The following account describes the ownership of a hotel in Po. It was recorded whilst working on post-tsunami relief projects in the area in 2005 and 2006. Additional details about the history of the hotel were provided by Lasantha, his family and other villagers during fieldwork in 2008 and 2012. In the period before the tsunami, there were only a handful of guest houses and one hotel in Po. The guest houses were all owned by families from the village. The hotel was owned by a co-operative from Matara. After the tsunami it was taken over by an elite Sri Lankan family from Matara (the family I first live with and described in Chapter 2) who had returned from the US to care for relatives following the tsunami. The influx of foreign NGO staff and volunteers in the area, as a result of the tsunami disaster, resulted in entrepreneurs from Matara and nearby towns recognising the business potential of the area and setting up their own guest houses and restaurants. It was an ideal period to build a guest house as coastal land was readily accessible and cheaper due to building restrictions imposed by the buffer zone. These transactions were also facilitated by national policies favourable to the development of the tourist industry.

The *Coral garden* hotel benefited from a full refurbishment in 2005 and 2006, having suffered considerable damage in the tsunami. The head of the family happened to be involved with the Sri Lankan Tourism Board at the time and was the chairman of a Catering school. The owner's wife, Chandrika, had been involved with a number of NGOs since the tsunami and acted as the local financial administrator for some and, in other cases, was a local project co-ordinator. These connections had greatly benefited the couple in terms of the hotel, as one NGO donated funds for the refurbishment of part of the hotel, whilst another donated a boat and a 25hp outboard motor for river boat trips with their guests. Many of the NGO staff returned for holidays with friends and would spend a week or two at the hotel. The hotel had also for a while become a central venue for hosting NGO meetings and conferences, as well as being a site for entertaining local politicians.

However, its position in the village is an ambiguous one. It is a part of village space but involves none of the locals from the community that hosts it. Many locals resent the fact that the hotel refused to share its business. There were many guesthouses in Po that offered diving trips, snorkelling and three-wheeler taxis, but even though the hotel did not offer these services, there was reluctance to pass business on to the wider community. Instead, there were many occasions when the owner and staff, according to locals, spread rumours and bad mouthed the other guest houses.

In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, the heads of some of these NGOs needed local representation. Chandrika was well-educated, fluent in English and had already established contacts with a number of NGOs. One NGO in particular was donating boats in the district and she was acting as their financial administrator. Gamburd notes that this was common in other parts of post-tsunami coastal Sri Lanka:

> In administering disaster aid, foreign and local donors search for local intermediaries to select worthy recipients, channel aid, and keep track of accomplishments. They seek intermediaries who are educated, respectable, efficient, and organized. The intermediaries should be familiar with the recipient community and should also have the linguistic and cultural fluency to communicate smoothly with the donors (Gamburd 2014: 116).

Chandrika had all of these qualities but also had investments in land and business in Po. These constituted a conflict of interest between her and her supposed beneficiaries. Chandrika suggested that the NGO start a co-operative for the people in Po who had lost boats. The NGO agreed and left the organisation of this project in her hands with the hotel as the organisational hub. Along with her husband she selected a total of fifteen people who would receive a boat and an engine, the requirements being that these individuals had lost a boat or been severely affected by the tsunami. However, most of those who received a boat either did not have one prior to the tsunami or already had another boat. Five of those who received a boat were guest house owners, the others were individuals who had land surrounding the hotel or they were, in fact, divers rather than fishermen. Distribution of aid (in this case boats and outboard motors) was made with patronage and debt in mind. As Fernando points out in relation to the distribution of aid in Sri Lanka:

> Selection of beneficiaries was not based on the factors determining the protection of IK[13]: rather, beneficiaries were handpicked by the village-elites based on patron-cliental relationships that would create an enabling environment for the commercialization of local production systems (Fernando 2003: 64).

In addition to financial administrator and project co-ordinator to a number of NGOs, Chandrika was also involved in the management of projects affiliated with a convent school. Her access to networks within the NGO community enabled her to direct funding towards the convent school. Helping the convent to access these funds, in turn, gave her a lot of influence in school affairs. In Po, the convent school is regarded as one of the best, and a desirable choice even for Sinhalese Buddhists. Most of the guest house owners and a number of other individuals have children who

[13] Indigenous knowledge

attend this school. Lasantha says, 'I do not like them, but what to do? He (hotel owner) gave me a boat I cannot say anything'. Saran says, 'If we make trouble then maybe they won't accept our daughters into the school anymore'. The owner could also call on the villagers to carry the boat and steer it when he takes guests on the river, without paying them. Any protest was likely to result in a reminder that aid had been given because of the hotel owners' efforts. Lasantha explained to me that Chandrika and her husband were interested in acquiring the land surrounding the hotel to expand their own business, as well as using aid to divert support away from other local businesses. Similarly, Gunewardena (2008) notes how hotels all along the coast, even prior to the tsunami had, in effect, privatised the beaches and prohibited locals from accessing the coast. Locals in many cases were portrayed as a source of trouble to tourists. Socialisation between the two groups was discouraged by hotel staff and tourists left with an image of the beauty of the island and the savagery of the local, even when they had had no encounters with locals.[14] Lasantha and other villagers believed that the *Coral Garden* hotel, aided by some NGOs, were attempting to appropriate the land around them in very much the same way.

The example of the *Coral Garden* hotel is one of many that illustrates the ways that aid distribution post-tsunami becomes implicated in local political networks. That this was the case is hardly surprising. Sri Lanka, and especially village Sri Lanka, has long been structured on systems of patronage (Leach 1961; Brow 1981; Alexander 1995; Stirrat 1996; Spencer 1990a and 2007). Frerks and Klem confirm this observation. Frerks and Klem, whilst carrying out an evaluation of post-tsunami conditions in and around Sri Lanka, recorded the following:

> Aid has become a resource to be controlled by competing political interests and thereby a politicised issue in and of itself. Political parties try to get political mileage and gain popular support on the basis of the provision of aid and support to the local population. Though this is already a general feature of the prevailing patronage politics in Sri Lanka, the enormous amounts of aid given or pledged add to this dynamic. A fairly innocent illustration is the following anecdote told by the chairman of a local NGO in the east.
>
> "Politics is certainly a factor. We had proposed to build 100 new houses and we had arranged for the funds. Everything was looking fine. On the day we were going to put the foundations, the whole thing was blocked by the Urban Development Authority. It transpired that they were not against the project as such, but the problem was that the

[14] This information is taken from recordings of chance encounters with tourists at beaches adjoining resorts, visited throughout the course of my fieldwork. I would visit a nearby beach every 2 – 3 weeks for a few hours to take a break from the field. On many of these occasions I would end up talking to other foreigners in restaurants and bars along the beach.

Minister had wanted to open the scheme. Who the Minister is? Please, I'd better reserve my comments. Apart from God's blessing, you need political blessing" (Frerks and Klem 2005: 19).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have talked about the extent of the effects of the tsunami on coastal Sri Lankan communities, with reference to the two communities that are the focus of this thesis. In doing so I have provided details of the experiences of locals caught up in the disaster and its aftermath. These case studies serve to depict just how traumatic the effects of the disaster were, and therefore provide a backdrop for the reader to understand the discussions that follow in the rest of the thesis. The major concern for locals in the aftermath of the tsunami was the re-establishment of a sense of normalcy. For many locals this meant being able to rebuild their broken homes. The 100 metre buffer zone policy proved an impediment to this. Many locals found themselves without a home and were transferred to localities where they knew few people and had weak social networks. The disaster had certainly wreaked havoc, but the policies and development post-tsunami had added further calamity.

In the case of locals who had managed to remain in their homes, they faced two problems. The first was coping with the actual changes brought about by the tsunami wave: the destruction of property, death and injury, disruption of livelihood activities and the trauma of the experience. The second was coping with the loss of large swathes of coastal land to outsiders. Sri Lankan entrepreneurs and foreign expats who acquired coastal land had considerable economic and social capital. This resulted in a shift in patterns of power distribution and locals found themselves having to negotiate with, and adapt to, the changes this brought with it. Already existing structures of power centred around family and kinship were adapted to cope with the changes wrought by the tsunami. In the next chapter I take a closer look at how kinship and community are understood in this part of Sri Lanka, in particular the ways in which villagers have utilised the kin idiom to organise and re-organise social relationships in everyday life in the tsunami aftermath.

Chapter 4 - Kin and Community

Asanka had campaigned for the post of mayor of Matara town on the SLFP ticket in 2009-2010.[15] He had dropped out of the running before the election, but had gained many influential contacts in the process of campaigning. Asanka utilised his new contacts and political influence to provide favours to other villagers and facilitate his access to land and development schemes in the area. Since the campaign, Suranji was always at his side.

Suranji was a childhood friend and had recently become the 'big man' (their term) in the village of Thomale. Once the political campaign was abandoned, Asanka took Suranji under his wing. He told me:

> That time everyone know him, he a very strong man, but fighting too much and drinking too much. One day I told him to sit with me and we talk, and I tell him "This is not the proper way, always dressed badly, always drinking and fighting, people afraid of you but nobody love you". I teach him how to dress well, you see him now? Always with the trousers, shirt and clean black shoes, and his hair always neat now. I have many friends in the town, they are doctors and engineers, and lawyers, like that; they make good money, then they give out the loans, but many people not paying them, so I introduce them to Suranji and now he work with them. He is, how do you say ……. loan shark?

When Asanka and Suranji approached me in the beginning of February 2012, it was to offer me a house that Suranji had for rent in Thomale. The rent was higher than was normal, but it was a good house and he assured me I wouldn't find a better deal. It transpired later, that the house was in fact Suranji's own home. What I didn't know was that I would be renting his house, as well as paying the rent for another house for him to stay in, for the duration of my stay in Thomale. When I later asked Asanka about this he explained that Thomale wasn't a very safe place to live in without connections. Suranji was the big man in the village at the time and connected to Asanka's family through business with him. Suranji is also related to Asanka's older brother's (Sunil) wife, Gunangi. Gunangi is Suranji's cross-cousin [*nänā*]. Asanka explained that no one in the village would trouble me because I was living in Suranji's house and it was in his interest to keep me safe. It was a shrewd move on

[15] Since 2004 in the run up to the 2005 presidential election the SLFP formed part of a wider alliance the UPFA (United People's Freedom Alliance). Although numerous political and civil society groups form part of this alliance, the SLFP is still the largest group within it and local people still refer to the alliance as the SLFP, the blue party or the leaf party (the alliance is represented by a betel leaf symbol). Similarly, the UNP form part of a similar alliance of a number of political groups, the UNF (United National Front). Locals refer to the UNF as the UNP, the green party or the elephant party (the party, as well as the alliance, is represented by an elephant symbol).

Asanka's part. I was associated with Asanka and his family in both Po and Thomale. My occupation of Suranji's house was an extension of Asanka and his family's presence in the centre of Thomale, occupying the 'big man's house'. It provided Hamzi and his family members with legitimacy in Thomale social space and provided a constant reminder of their presence there, as well as their superior status by sending in a foreigner. Furthermore, it showed everyone that close relations existed between Asanka and Suranji. Asanka had transformed Suranji's attire to make it look like his own, they conducted business together, they had family connections and they referred to each other as cross-cousins/brothers-in-law [*massinā*]. They had cemented their kinship – i.e. kinship wasn't something that was given, but was formed over time. Kinship in Po and Thomale can be a way of securing financial support, protection and local political stability. Kinship in this context, as I show in this chapter, is also about community building.

In this chapter, I analyse local understandings of family, kin relations, kin terminologies, networks and factions in coastal southern Sri Lanka. In particular, I elucidate how social relations have changed and also how kinship and community bonds aided villagers in their recovery after the disaster. In doing so, I first draw on existing accounts of Sinhalese kinship for what they tell us about kinship in other parts of Sri Lanka at different periods of time. The latter point is significant as little work has been published exclusively on Sri Lankan kinship in recent decades. Writing about kinship among the Sinhalese and the Merina twenty-five years ago, Mick Moore (1981) identified the fluid and adaptable nature of kinship in these social contexts. I posit, following on Moore, that a 'complete map' of kin groups is not possible. Due to the fluid nature of kin relations in the communities at the centre of this thesis, an analysis of kinship reveals much about social relations and the political tensions brought about by post-tsunami development at the local level, but little about a regularized kin structure. In this regard Moore writes:

> As individuals and families change their relative economic ranking, the definition, as well as the reality, of kin group boundaries changes. The use of the loose concept, translated as 'family', to describe close kin can help to disguise this divergence of norm from reality by evasion of the problem of precise definition. No complete map of the composition of kin groups is possible because 'boundary disputes' are inherent in the system (Moore 1981: 582).

The relationship that formed between Asanka and Suranji utilised a kin idiom and a family connection also existed. Their relationship also created a partnership that united two strong families in Po and Thomale, in a bid to control disputes over land between other families from the two localities. Disputes were largely due to the increased availability of land and development (in terms of construction) opportunities that emerged in the aftermath of the tsunami. When I first lived in Po

from 2005 – 2006, Lasantha had revealed that his family, including himself, were staunch supporters of the UNP party. Lasantha explained that it had been very difficult to get any aid towards rebuilding their destroyed homes, and in 2006 it was suggested that supporting the UPFA (or the blue party as he referred to them) might facilitate this process. When I asked him what he had done he said, 'Then we just put out the blue banner outside the home, then everybody know.' Shortly after, they received monetary aid for the construction of their home even though the amount given was deemed insufficient. Lasantha said, 'they gave us 2.5lakh, only enough for one room, but if we don't change party then maybe we receive nothing.' The political atmosphere after the tsunami and the new development policies, outlined in the previous chapter, forced locals to restructure their alliances to gain access to land, development projects and aid. In light of the widespread political patronage linked with aid distribution post-tsunami, how did kin relations facilitate the recovery process?

James Brow (1996) has argued that the changing political structure, increased dependency on wage labour and new development projects in rural Sri Lanka in the 1970s and 1980s have had an effect on local conceptions of kinship and its attached obligations. Brow had conducted his doctoral fieldwork in northern Sri Lanka between 1968 and 1970, concentrating on kinship and economic life (1996: 10). He returned for fieldwork to the same village in 1983. Brow notes how the changing political atmosphere in Sri Lanka at the time, and particularly the ethnic crisis between Tamils and Sinhalese, fractured traditional notions of kinship and community giving way to factional conflict and individual opportunism (1996: 14-19). Brow's work is important here as it benefits from observations and insight into a single community over a period of time marked by significant social and political upheaval. Works on kinship and community in and around Sri Lanka have been researched and written at various points over the past six decades, and it is useful to look at them sequentially here for what they may reveal about the contemporary situation in post-tsunami Sri Lanka.

Kinship, community and land

In order to situate my observations of post-tsunami coastal Sri Lanka within the wider literature on kinship and land tenure in Sri Lanka, I draw comparisons between some of the most well-known and relevant works on kinship in Sri Lanka in the last six decades. Presenting them sequentially illustrates traditional notions of kinship in different areas of the island and within contrasting social and geographical settings. These works provide a departure point for understanding the infiltration of a tourism oriented micro-economy in the coastal areas and the extent to which the tsunami and ensuing development actually affected social relations in Po and Thomale. Perhaps the most

notable of these works was Leach's *Pul Eliya* (1961). Leach's monograph was based on fieldwork in a rural community in north central Sri Lanka and was carried out in 1954. Leach observed that although kinship and land ownership *seem* to be organised according to membership of caste/sub-caste groups [*variga*], the fragmentation of land ownership and factionalism were more influenced by demographic changes and the pursuit of individual interests. Furthermore, kinship rules appeared to be highly flexible as evidenced by the tendency of the *variga* court to overlook membership rules and accept outsiders whom they approved into this supposedly endogamous group (see also Brow 1996). The examples cited by Leach (and Brow) refer to villagers marrying outside the village and caste group, or outsiders moving in and purchasing land in the village. Both Leach and Brow have noted how the *variga* court often accepted outsiders into the community subject to a fine. Kinship, Leach claims, is thus more an instrument for talking about land rights and land interests, rather than a 'thing in itself' (1961:305). In this latter claim, Leach was challenging the belief among structural-functionalists at the time that kinship was a separate domain (Tambiah 2002:166), of clearly defined rules and structures that encouraged solidarity and amity. On this aspect of the nature of kinship in Sri Lanka, Obeyesekere and Leach seem to agree.

Written partly as a response to Leach's monograph, Obeyesekere's (1967) study on *Land tenure in village Ceylon* takes place in the south of the island and stands out for its consideration of a historical dimension, namely the effects of colonial policies on land tenure. These aspects, he argues, are ignored by Leach. Like Leach, however, Obeyesekere maintains that it is demographic change that leads to the fragmentation of land ownership. Where they differ is that while Leach is more concerned with the way kinship is used as a tool for understanding land rights and land ownership and the relationships that develop around land, Obeyesekere is more concerned with the way colonial policies have affected the community's ability to grow naturally and retain some form of social stability. The disintegration of traditional structures, Obeyesekere tells us, had begun during the colonial period. Obeyesekere explains how land was presided over by a corporate group of agnatic kin – the *vāsagama*. Through this group system each member held a share (through genealogical affiliation) of the total land holding. Use of the land shares was based on a rotation system that ensured each landholder had equal access to the entire plot, thus, preventing the continuous attachment of one person to a single section. Eventually, as the population increased beyond the equitable use and distribution of land, new hamlets (*gama*) were formed. Membership in the village was identified through the ownership of land, as in this way one literally came to own a part in the village. Obeyesekere illustrates how land taxes introduced during the colonial period financially crippled peasants forcing them to sell their land to outsiders as a result, whilst the Crown Lands Ordinance prevented the formation of new villages. The final blow was dealt by the Roman-

Dutch property laws that replaced patrilineal inheritance with bilateral inheritance leading to the fragmentation and sale of more village land. This latter development led to the formation of the *peläntiya*, a status group of kinsmen interested in the purchase of land for prestige, in some cases purchasing ridiculously small plots of land. Members of the *peläntiya*, Obeyesekere notes, often held civil service positions and, he posits, it was this group that formed the basis of the new urban middle-class. Spencer (1990) argues that ownership of paddy land in this latter respect 'connotes potential control over people' or 'personal autonomy from the control of others', and its appeal in terms of prestige may have resided in these kinds of considerations (1990: 103).

Leach and Obeyesekere's works tell us about the organisation of social relations around land ownership and their functions in two very different parts of Sri Lanka. Tambiah has also stated that any study of kinship structure in Sinhalese society must be related to land ownership and property rights (1958: 25). Tambiah asserts that due to the scarcity of land and its importance to peasant communities' survival, kinship in Sri Lanka has evolved as a way of organising land and its use, in the process giving rise to situations of conflict and co-operation between individuals and groups over the use of land. According to Tambiah, kinship emerges as a measure for a group to protect its right to exploit land (1965: 131-132).

The Sinhalese kinship system is based on the Dravidian system, even though a good deal of variation exists between communities across Sri Lanka as evidenced by the available literature. In a Sinhalese-Catholic community on the north-west coast of Sri Lanka, Stirrat (1977) found a system with a varied terminology where even some of the locals admitted that they thought it was not the correct interpretation. On the terminological variation in Wellagoda, Stirrat notes that: 'Thus in colloquial usage there is a tendency for affinal terms to be replaced by consanguineal terms. This has the effect of implying more formal relationships than would otherwise hold good' (Stirrat 1977:276). Stirrat suggests that this variation in terminology is the result of a shift in morality that is rooted in the customs attached to marriage and the relations this establishes, within the Sinhalese Catholic context. He rejects Tambiah's (1973) argument that marriage customs can be explained through inheritance rules, arguing that if this were the case it would be equally possible to explain inheritance rules through marriage customs.

Yalman(1967) notes that in Sinhalese kinship, 'we are dealing mainly with a system of abstract 'categories' which order social relations in the most general sense' (1967: 279). Yalman in his monograph *Under the Bo tree* devotes considerable space to talking about the conceptual structure of kinship. He argues that the categories, which are organised through terminology, represent an ideal system of relations emerging as a result of close kin marriage. However, Yalman seems to

believe that kinship terminologies determine a kinship structure, and seems to suggest that kinship exists as a system within its own right, even though he recognises that there are numerous kin group variations across Sri Lanka. Much of the disagreement between the authors thus far has been on the use of terminologies, which Moore (1981) suggests is a 'peripheral issue' to the topic of kin structure. However, Stirrat (1977) points out with reference to the village of Wellagoda that locals are knowledgeable of the standard kinship terminology, yet do not use it. The question he sees emerging as a result is: 'What is it that leads some members of a society to use kinship terminology which differs from that generally used in their society?' (Stirrat 1977: 272). He indicates that this is in fact not a 'peripheral issue' as Moore suggests, but one that reveals a high rate of social adaptability in a context of constant social flux and crisis. This fits in well with the context of contemporary Sri Lanka where loss of family members through civil conflict, disasters, tragedies and economic upheaval have led to changes in notions of relatedness to accommodate new relations with outsiders. The traditional village structure has changed over the years and the purchase of and claim to land ownership by outsiders have probably been the greatest instigators of this shift. In Stirrat's study in Wellagoda, he points out that the standard Sinhalese kin terminology is one that encourages endogamy, whereas that used by his informants is one that encourages marrying out (1977: 287-288). Stirrat tells us that this variation in Wellagoda is an expression of independence and reduces the number of consanguine relations and the obligations that come with these relations.

How have changes in land ownership and the increased presence of foreigners post-tsunami affected village social relations? How are these relations organised around land? What place, if any, do foreigners occupy in the villages they inhabit? The very fact that foreigners may become part of the extended kin network is a confirmation of the strategic and political nature of kinship and kin networks in this context and confirms Moore's observation that: 'A statement of kinship is a statement of actual or desired social relationships' (Moore 1981: 584). Thus far, the available literature on kinship and land tenure in Sri Lanka has illustrated the various ways in which kinship is thought of and applied across various parts of the island. They indicate that property is central, groups are flexible and the kinship ideal (in terminology) is very different from that in practice.

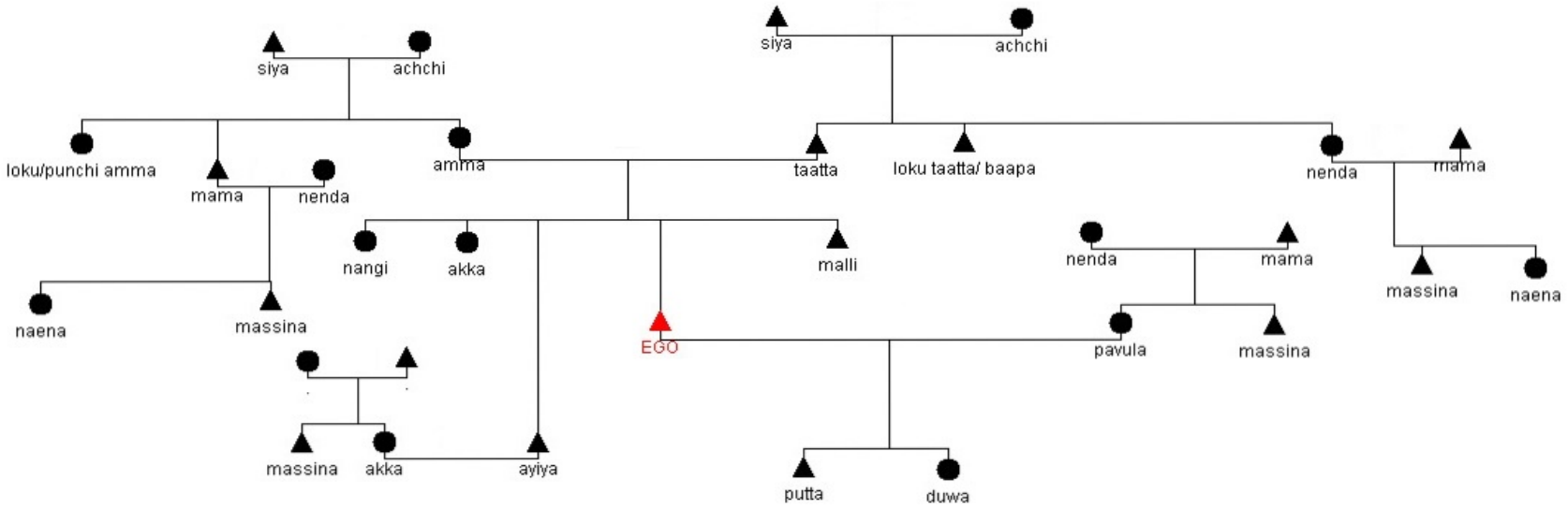

Figure 8 Terminological kin structure in both Po and Thomale. Male Ego and his bilateral kin, illustrating who he would normally be understood to draw his support from for financial aid and support.

The diagram illustrates the bilateral kin of a male ego in either Po or Thomale. Local usages of kin terminologies are similar to the standard Sinhalese (Dravidian) kin terminology. How these relationships and their assumed attached obligations play out in everyday life is another matter altogether. As I go on to show, competition over land development opportunities, and individual interests in these two post-tsunami communities have altered villagers' understanding of traditional notions of kin and community.

Kin, community and land in coastal Sri Lanka

Kin and Community in Thomale

Whilst living at Suranji's house in Thomale I was surrounded by his family members and friends many of whom were living in the same street. Next door, to the left of my house, was Suranji's paternal uncle [*baapa*] Subha, who was also Toni's maternal uncle [*māmā*]. In the house bordering my backyard were Toni and his elderly mother. Two of Suranji's cousins, Jagath and Suranga, lived beyond the market, a few minutes from my house. A number of Suranji's close friends were often present in the market area. Other family members lived further inland, in other parts of the village. Subha lived with his wife and two daughters (both in their late teens). Subha, a fisherman, owned two large fishing boats and a van that was used to transport fish to sell in other localities. The fishing boats had inboard engines and were used for long fishing trips that could last between five and ten days. Although Subha referred to himself as a fisherman [*dhiväreyā*], he hadn't been out fishing in three years. He rented his boats out to two groups of six fishermen each in exchange for a fee for the use of the boat and a percentage of the total catch.[16] He oversaw the maintenance of the boats and organised the sale of the catch. His wife, Harshini, and his two daughters took care of drying fish in the months before the monsoon season, and the fish would be sold in town and provided supplementary income.

[16] When I asked Subha about this in April 2012, the fee was of a collective Rs. 1000 a day plus 25 per cent of the total catch, although this amount fluctuated. In the fishing season (Nov – April), fishermen opted to go out on smaller boats, for shorter but more frequent fishing trips. During the monsoon months, May –September, long fishing trips (typically 5 – 10 days) off the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka were the only ways for fishermen to supplement their income during these few months. Subha would sometimes take up to 50 per cent of the catch for the use of his boat during the monsoon months. When members of a boat could not pay the boat fee, their debt could be subtracted from their catch.

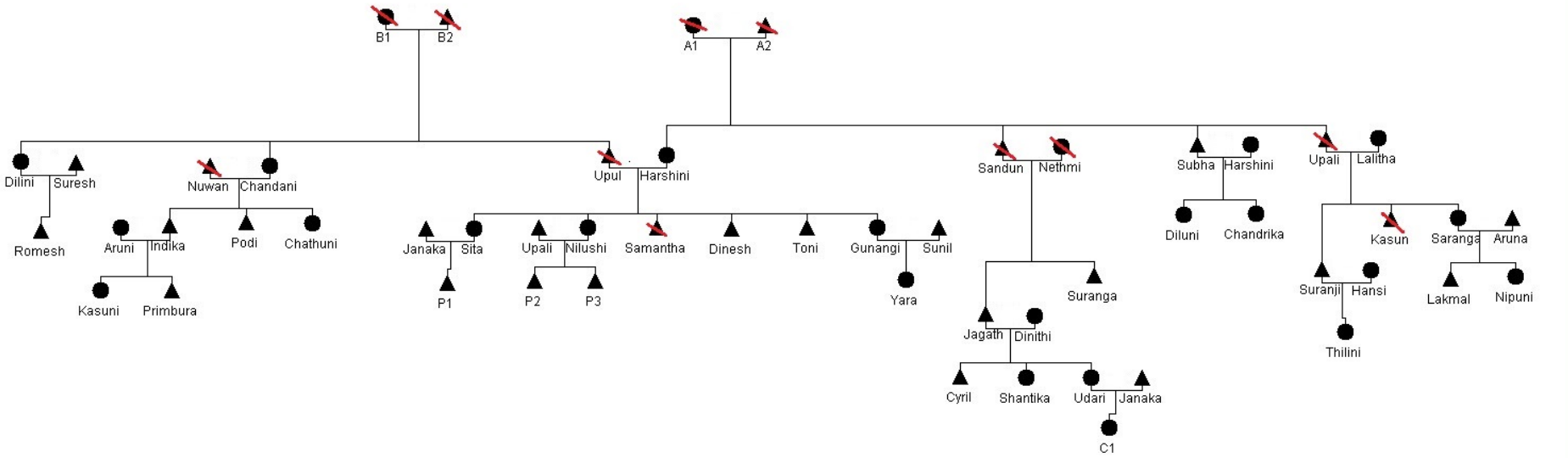

Figure 9 Gunangi and Toni's bilateral kin in Thomale (54 individuals), illustrating their main family network in the village. A red line across an individual indicates death.

Subha is Toni's maternal uncle [*māmā*], although because of their similar age and friendship they often referred to one another as *massinā*. Toni lived in the house behind my own and adjacent to Subha's. Toni is well known among villagers in the communities surrounding Thomale and Po. In the past he had done well as a fisherman and had bought himself a large boat, one that was used for going on long fishing trips for weeks at a time. Like Subha, he had started by renting it out to a crew of seven men who would then also give him a percentage of the catch. With the money, he invested in more fishing boats, catamarans and FRPs (Fibre Reinforced Plastic boats). Lasantha and my neighbours in Thomale told me that Toni used to return daily with bags of money with which he was very generous. He helped numerous other villagers to build and repair their houses, pay off debts and pay for small parties. In this way, he created an extensive series of patron-client relations. Those he helped with money could not pay him back and were indebted to him.

He had created an unofficial village co-operative where employment on shared boats could be offered to those in dire need of money. This, I was told, was the way Toni had organised his group of people [*kattiya*] in the years prior to the tsunami. Even though Thomale was largely side-lined from receiving aid following the tsunami, this previously established co-operative system between villagers was important in helping them overcome the disaster. This may explain why despite having been so badly hit by the wave, few villagers spent long periods of time in IDP camps, or temporary shelters in the aftermath and why many were able to start fishing again only months after the tsunami.

Toni was also a celebrated fighter and quick to get involved in any physical disputes affecting his people. He also became a significant link between Lasantha's family in Po and the village of Thomale. I recall having been introduced to him for the first time in 2006. By 2008 he had become a familiar face and I got to know him well whilst conducting fieldwork for my MA research. At the time, I was working in another two fishing communities, with fishermen I had known since the initial post-tsunami period. I would meet Toni by chance on the odd morning when he'd come with his closest friend Podi to swim in the sea in front of my house in Po. He would always insist I join him for a drink of *arrack*, a bottle of which was always stashed about his person. Our meetings became more and more frequent when I began to run into him at small social gatherings, healing ceremonies [*thovil*], weddings and other such occasions or events. Towards the end of my fieldwork in 2008, I had begun to purchase fish from Thomale as a result of my friendship with Toni. Toni would grab me by my arm and gleefully escort me round the village centre, which also doubled up as the permanent fish market. Much to my embarrassment, he would lead me around each stall to inspect

the fish, select the best, clean it and wrap it himself and, with an authoritative glare, gesture to me to put my money away before sending me on my way with a loud pat on the back.

Figure 10 Toni in 2008 at the fish market in Thomale.

I had been told by people in both Po and Thomale that even before the tsunami, villagers from Thomale received very little help from outside the village. Boats were expensive to buy and maintain, as were the nets and equipment. Fuel was also expensive. The civil war between the GoSL and the LTTE in the north and east had limited southern Sri Lankan fishermen's access to the east coast during the southern monsoon season. Navy patrol boats routinely stopped any boats venturing within a certain distance of the Eastern coastal waters and, I was told by local fishermen, sometimes confiscated catches and equipment. As a result, many fishermen hoped to make enough money during the fishing season to see them through the monsoon. Prior to the tsunami, over a hundred and fifty households in Thomale were involved in fishing. Toni had employed numerous family members, friends and neighbours from Thomale on his boats, using a rotation system – fishermen would go out on an FRP on one day, a Catamaran on the next, and a large inboard engine boat on another. Some fishermen from other localities such as Matara *kotuwa* [Fort] and Medawatta with whom Toni was friendly also fished using his boats. Fishermen employed on his boats co-operated together and developed friendly relations, or strengthened the relationships they

had already established between them. As a result of the rotation system, the fishermen working on Toni's boats had all worked together at one time or another, further strengthening the bond between them. When the tsunami hit the coastal communities, most boats were destroyed and fishermen found themselves without any means to continue their livelihoods. Some boats had been salvaged and some fishermen were lucky enough to receive boats not long after the disaster. The friendly relations and co-operation that existed between fishermen as a result of working on Toni's boats allowed for the continuation of co-operation in the aftermath of the disaster. Fishermen again utilised the boats available to them on a rotation basis, in order to guarantee that their people had the bare minimum of employment until they received aid or could afford to buy more boats. In doing so, they retained many of the same partnerships they had formed whilst working on Toni's boats.

When I decided to return to Sri Lanka for research in 2012, I was looking to settle in Thomale for half the time, with Toni as my primary gate-keeper and to spend the other half with Lasantha's family in Po. The plan was to commute between the two localities. My meetings with Toni in the past and the hold he had over a wide social network covering the two villages and beyond had inspired me to take advantage of this blooming friendship to look at how social relations are created and maintained. During my first week of fieldwork in 2012, I went to visit Toni in Thomale together with Lasantha. I met a barely distinguishable Toni. He was still tall, but skinny and frail looking, he had lost two thirds of his body weight and was partially deaf. Toni had been an avid drinker since his late teenage years. In his early forties his habit had become a crippling addiction that had spiralled out of control. It resulted in the loss of all his accumulated wealth, as well as seriously affecting his health. His physical ailments, poverty, and all-consuming drink habit, also reduced his social standing and influence. It did not however, diminish people's respect for him, or erase the memory of his past generosity even though the respect they retained for him was not always immediately evident. He was only 48 years old when all this happened.

The rotation system that Toni introduced between his fishermen created not only a series of close relationships on his boats, but also a support system that extended to dry land, in times of conflict and need. Chamil was a fisherman from *Kotuwa* who had been re-located by the government to a tsunami housing scheme five kilometres from *Kotuwa*. According to Chamil after the tsunami fishermen could only turn to each other for help. Chamil had worked with Toni before the tsunami and now he owns his own boat, but he still gives a substantial amount of his catch to Subha to be sold and to be transported using his van, to other localities. Although Toni no longer went fishing or owned any boats, the co-operative system he introduced continued to operate. Many of the

fishermen he employed previously now work on boats owned by Subha, Chamil, or Ramesh (another fisherman from Thomale). Members of these co-operative groups can and do request small loans of money from the boat owners when needed. Many of the fishermen drink and socialise together and their wives take care of each other's children.

Brow (1996), following on Max Weber, has defined community as 'a sense of belonging together' (Weber 1978:40 cited in Brow 1996:18). Brow goes on to say that, '…this typically combines both affective and cognitive components, both a feeling of solidarity and an understanding of a shared identity' (1996:18). This definition of community seems to apply to a large section of fishing families in Thomale and some fishing families located outside of Thomale. Their shared identity as fishermen and as people side-lined by the rest of society encourages solidarity and co-operation among and between them. Most of the fishermen I have talked with throughout the years have underlined the lack of support they receive from government agencies and NGOs, as well as the disdain with which they are treated by the rest of Sinhalese society. Toni set up a co-operative system between fishermen working on his boats as a way of helping friends and family members to cope with the uncertainties that are a major part of their everyday lives. The co-operative system provided a solution to the limited employment available to fishermen, who were unable to purchase their own fishing vessels and equipment due to lack of funds on their part. The co-operative system also led to the formation of a tightly bound social group providing financial support and kinship. Members aid each other in times of need, take on the roles of carers for each other's children, provide support during conflicts, and socialise on a regular basis.

Fishermen in Thomale who work closely together sometimes describe themselves as *massinā* and *sahōdaraya* (used between siblings), even when no such family connection exists between them. On one occasion I was sitting by the river with Jagath, a day labourer, and Podi and Siri, both fishermen. At one point I asked Podi and Siri how they were related, since Podi had referred to Siri as his *massinā* on other occasions. Podi laughed and replied that they weren't related through family. They had grown up together in the same village, had gone to the same school, they socialised together, and occasionally worked together on fishing boats. Kin terminology was used to identify close friendships and group membership or brotherhood. This was especially common between men of the same age group. I did not note this tendency among their wives. The use of kin terminology to refer to close friendships did not, it seems, necessarily denote the requirement to fulfil obligations usually associated with family ties, rather, its use in these instances denotes a sense of community, in other words, a sense of belonging together.

In the course of evenings spent socialising with fishermen in Thomale, jokes often circulated involving some of the elder sons and daughters of the men present, in which it was made clear that the men regarded unions between their sons and daughters favourably. For example, Subha who has two daughters and a lucrative business through the rental of his boats and his van, often hinted at his desire to see his youngest daughter, Chandrika, married to Samson's son, Sagath. Samson works as Subha's boat driver on one of his large boats; they have known each other since childhood and are close friends. Sagath is also well liked by Subha and had joined his father on a number of fishing trips. Subha's hints took the form of jokes, but Podi had explained to me that Subha was not joking. Subha's favour towards Sagath as a possible husband for his daughter is understandable in light of their relationship. Sagath already works on his boats and his father is one of Subha's closest friends whom he refers to as his *massinā*. Furthermore, Subha is extremely attached to his daughter and other locals have suggested that it would be very hard on Subha should his daughter marry an outsider and move to another locality. Marriage to an outsider is an uncertain affair and families are never sure of the true character and intentions of individuals outside of their locality. For instance, in 2008 while visiting a fishing family living in a tsunami village just outside Matara, I was informed that their eldest daughter had married a somewhat wealthy tradesman from Hambantota and moved to the city of Hambantota after their wedding. The family were happy and proud that their daughter had wed such an affluent man. When I re-visited the family in 2012 I was surprised to find the daughter living at home with her parents. When I unwittingly asked her as to the whereabouts of her husband, she responded with, 'Now divorced. Husband is bad man, he a gang man'. Her marriage had only lasted a few months, and I was informed that her husband had been abusive and had made his money through dubious circumstances. This was not an isolated case and I had heard other stories of unsuccessful marriages to outsiders. In light of this, a marriage between Chandrika and Sagath holds many advantages to Subha: he gains a trusted heir to his business, he ensures security for his daughter, any possible domestic abuse can be avoided through appealing to Sagath's father and other kin, and the relationship reinforces the kinship that already exists between Subha and Samson.

Family and obligation in Po

In November 2012 I had moved to Sunil's house in Po after having spent nine months in Suranji's house in Thomale. Sunil is Asanka and Lasantha's older brother. Sunil lives with his wife Gunangi, who is originally from Thomale and is Suranji's *nänā* and Toni's younger sister [*nangi*]. Gunangi

works as a secretary at the forensics police branch in Matara and Sunil runs a four-room guest house. The guest house is divided between two concrete buildings of which the top part of one is his family's living quarters. The property is located 50 metres from the house of Hamzi, his father.

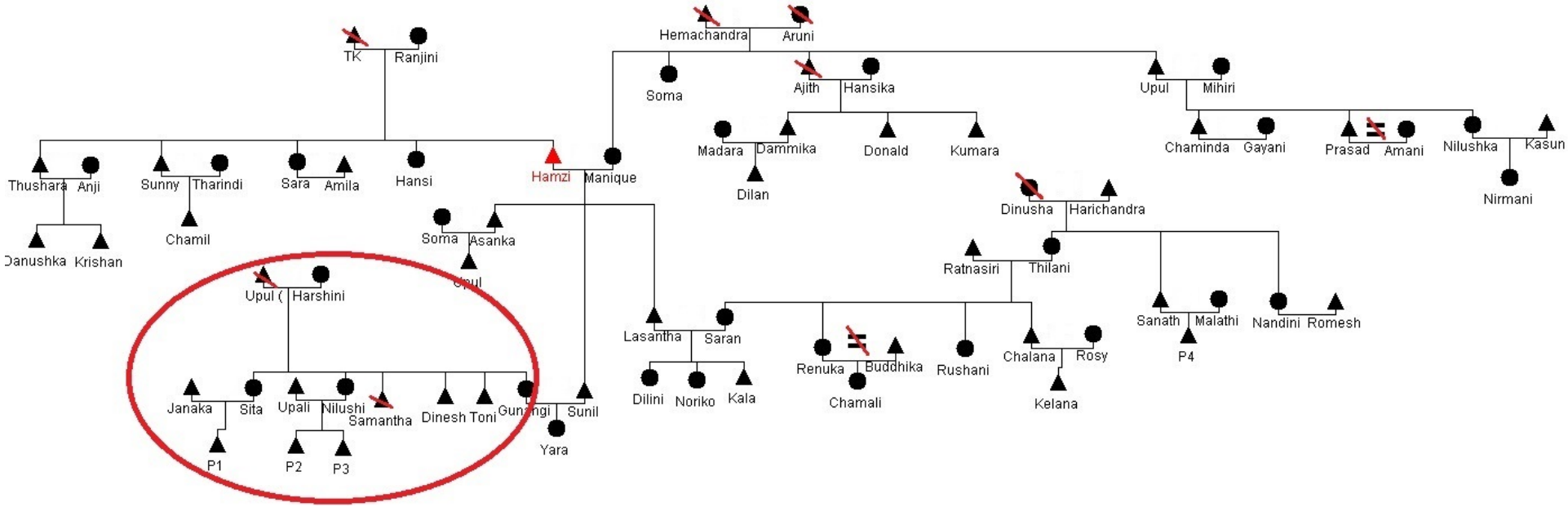

Figure 11 Hamzi (Lasantha's father) and some of his bilateral kin in Po (72 members). The red circle represents the Thomale family connection. Unions with a red line across indicate divorce, whereas individuals marked by a red line indicates death.

I was sitting on my porch at Sunil's home, it was early evening, and it was dark outside and raining. I heard the splash of footsteps in the muddy puddles of the lower garden. Asanka appeared out of the darkness, wet through and breathing heavily. He smiled at me and explained that he had seen my light on and decided to pay me a visit. He sat down and asked for a cigarette. It started raining heavily. I sat next to Asanka and unprompted he began telling me about his week. He told me he had spent most of his week driving around the town meeting lawyers and various other people in connection with buying a piece of land in Matara town. He related the following story:

> You know my father's brothers? They also live in Po. When my grandfather died he left everything to father's brothers and sisters, but nothing to father because he is the elder son. You ask him, when his father died my father organised the funeral and the almsgiving. He did everything right. Then his brothers and sisters came after for the funeral. The sisters they wanted the jewellery and some money, the brothers wanted all the land and money. Then they take everything, and my father had nothing. That was a long time ago, I was a very small boy, but I remember. Thushara (the youngest) he got my grandfather's guest house in Po and a shop in Matara. Sunny got the land in Po where he built his guest house and two lands in the town, one for 16 perches[17], one for 9 perches.

Asanka explained that relations between his father and his brothers were strained, but never amounted to confrontations since Asanka's father was the eldest of the family and is feared by his brothers. It was only when Asanka was in his mid-teens and Sunil had opened his own two-roomed guest house that tensions with their uncles reached new heights. At the time Lasantha had just got married and was living at his parents' home. His father, Hamzi, was working as a security guard inland and as a result he was often away from home for a few days at a time. Sunil had just opened a two-roomed guest house that his father had built for him. At the time, Lasantha had become good friends with Punchi, a man from Po ten years his senior who worked as a van driver for foreign tourists. Punchi introduced Lasantha to numerous foreigners and Lasantha would then direct them to his brother's guest house, and when full, to his mother's house (they rented two rooms to guests at the time). Asanka explained that his uncles, Thushara and Sunny, were angered by Sunil's success and felt they were being cheated out of business that they deemed was theirs by right. Sunny approached Sunil and told him that he should share his business, and should not create further problems for him and his family. Asanka said that Sunil ignored Sunny, and a few days later the uncles came to their house whilst Hamzi was away. Asanka said:

[17] One square perch is equivalent to twenty five square metres.

> They know father away and they both come with their sons and some friends from the other part of Po to beat us. They call out to Sunil to come out and fight them, then Lasantha calling Saran's father, Ratnasiri, and he came with two friends and stand outside the doors. He said if they want to come in they have to fight him. Then all left because they afraid of Ratnasiri.

Asanka explained that after that they had many problems with their uncles until the tsunami hit the island in 2004. He said that after the tsunami they forgot their previous quarrels, and added 'we understand each other's situation'. After the tsunami Sunil, Lasantha and Asanka began sending foreigners over to their uncles' guest houses. They sent guests to their uncles' restaurants and their uncles in turn sent guests to Sunil's restaurant and to Lasantha for snorkelling excursions. Asanka paused here and asked me for a piece of paper and pen. He started drawing a diagram of some plots of land. He pointed at the diagram and said,

> Two years before I bought the large land with help from Gareth. We bought it from Sunny and he sell it to us for less than the value, but only a little less. But I'm not angry with him then, he has to make money too. But on the small land there's a house, only three rooms and one family living there sixteen years, paying rent.

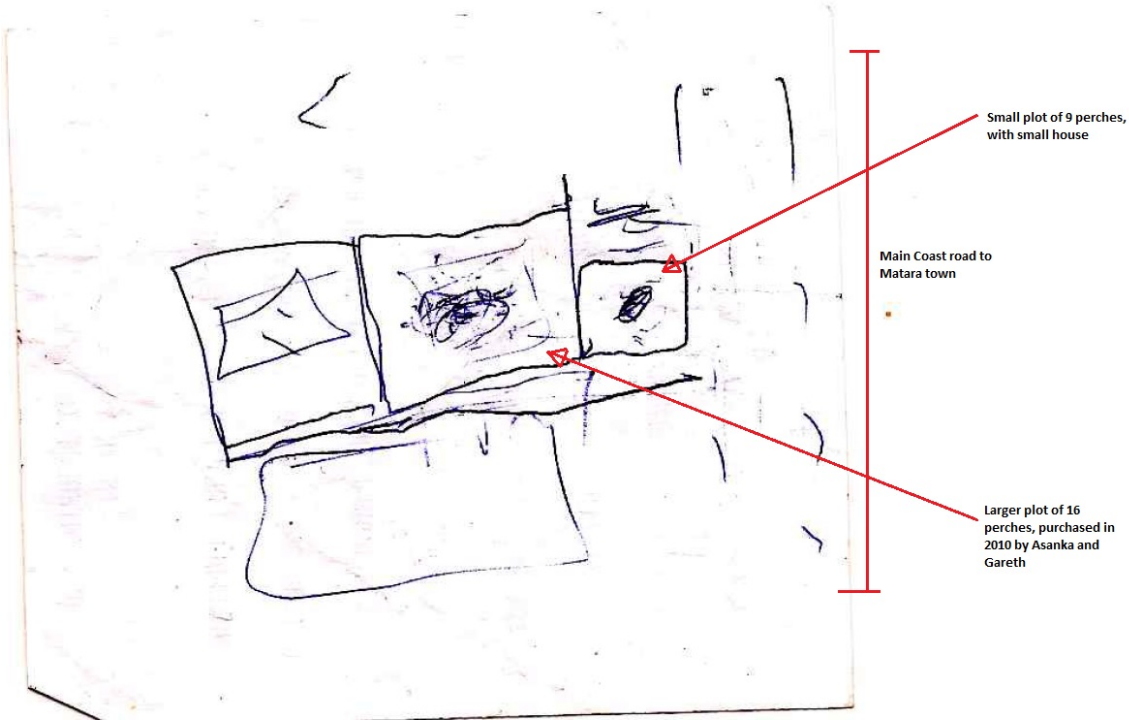

Figure 12 A scanned copy of Asanka's diagram of the plot he purchased from his uncle, and the smaller plot he was attempting to purchase.

Gareth is an English expat who had visited the island almost every year for the past decade. He had bought some land in Po in 2004 and, together with Asanka, had developed the land and built a boutique hotel in 2010. Asanka explained that together with Gareth, he planned to develop the land they had bought from Sunny into a block of offices and sell them out, since the location of the land, on the main coast road running to the centre of Matara town, would allow them to sell the offices for a large profit. In early 2012 Asanka and Gareth had decided to buy the second small patch of land to have full access to the main road. Asanka said:

> I asked my uncle to sell me that land too. First he didn't want, then he said he couldn't because the family had been there a long time and they could choose to leave or to stay. So, he told me if I talk to the family and ask them to leave then he can sell me the land. I said ok and I went to talk to the family. The family was one very old couple and their daughter and her husband. After I talking to them first time they say they don't want to move. I went many times to talk to them. Then they told me if I find them a better place in Matara town for the same rent, they will move. I talked to many of my friends in Matara and after two months we find them a house, they liked it and they moved in. After they moved I went to Sunny, and I told him "they are gone, now you can sell me the land". Before we had agreed to buy the land for 8lakh, but now Sunny say he want 20lakh but he give it to me for 12lakh. Then I get very angry. My father got no land from his father, his brothers get everything. We don't say anything. Then I buy the land from him almost full price, and now he try to cheat us with this land. They are not our family, only when they need us they come. I trust Gareth more than some of my relatives. Gareth is like real family.

Asanka explained that he had spent the week talking to lawyers and friends in the town to help him apply pressure on his uncle to sell him the land at the cheaper price. He explained that after this incident his family and friends were no longer talking to his uncle Sunny. As I was about to ask Asanka some further questions his wife, Soma, made herself visible in the dim light in front of the porch. She was armed with two umbrellas and a stern smile. Soma waited patiently for Asanka to say goodbye to me before he walked off with her.

Asanka felt that it was Sunny's obligation as his uncle to give him a better deal on the price of the land. The obligation to aid close kin financially can turn out to be altogether quite debilitating. When business at the guest house was slow following the tsunami, and therefore money was short, Lasantha had gone to the store of his uncle, Thushara, store to collect food items on credit. At one point, both Lasantha and his elder brother were taking items on credit for a period of over two months and together they piled up a debt to their father's brother [*baapa*] of 40,000 rupees (around

250 euros at the time), which they were unable to repay and which had placed their *baapa* in a very precarious financial situation. Tensions exist between brothers, uncles, and fathers and sons, in most cases as a result of the obligations attached to family hierarchy. Younger brothers are expected to obey and provide support to their older brothers, even to the detriment of their own independence and individual success. The eldest male child in the family is seen to have a privileged position of authority. The youngest male of a family is also privileged and will normally inherit the parents' home and will have the obligation to look after his parents in their old age. For example, Asanka, the youngest of three brothers, lives with his wife and son at his parents' home and will inherit the house when his parents die. Similarly, Saran's brother, Chalana, is the youngest child in his family and the only male. When he turned seventeen his father, Ratnasiri, began building an extension of three rooms adjoining the back of his house. This is where Chalana and his wife would live. I had asked villagers on numerous occasions whether obligations were usually met between brothers, and between parents and their children. Villagers I talked to in Po told me that there was a stigma associated with not aiding close family members. Individuals who did not aid family without good reason, were considered to have a bad character and poor moral fibre. A story I have been told a number of times concerning a local man, Indika, is particularly illustrative of the sometimes debilitating effects of family obligations.

Indika had emigrated to Australia when he was in his early twenties. He had received money from his parents and moved from job to job during his first years away, accumulating enough capital in the process to eventually open his own flower shop. His business thrived and he was able to open up a second shop and a flower delivery service. Meanwhile in Po, Indika's elder brother was unemployed and had been so for many months. Indika's father contacted him and ordered him to purchase a plane ticket for his elder brother to go and run the business for him. He sent the ticket and his brother went to Australia but in a short time Indika's brother ran his business to the ground and spent large sums of money on drink and gambling. Indika was forced to return with his brother to Sri Lanka, where Indika now manages a small clothes boutique in Matara town. Although the provision of support for one's family members is described as a duty, I have noted many situations where family members, and especially siblings, had fallen out as a result of disputes over money and inheritance. When a degree of solidarity did exist between brothers, disputes between their wives proved to be another challenge to the stability of their relationships.

All the marriages I recorded in both Po and Thomale, without exception, were *diiga* marriages (patrilocal marriages), resulting in virilocal residence. Men expressed preference for such marriages citing connections to land, livelihood resources, and one's supportive group of male kin as reasons

for this preference. Some of the women who married and moved to Po from other localities, told me that initially they missed their parents and siblings. Some women found themselves overwhelmed by the amount of work involved in taking care of the home and in many cases their spouse's parents' home. Lasantha's wife, Saran, had often told me that she and Sunil's wife, Gunangi rarely got along and there had been a number of conflicts between them. Saran said it was a problem of jealousy [*irisiyāva*] – that Gunangi disliked the fact that Lasantha always had business, whereas Sunil rarely had any. She added that foreigners much preferred to stay with Lasantha who took good care of them and formed lasting friendships with them, whereas Sunil and Gunangi were more concerned with making as much money as they could by whatever means. She told me,

> Sunil always drinking, he never take care of his business. Then when people at our house he comes to have drinks with them and try to take them to his place – but Lasantha always make the friendships – he show them to Sunil – then I am very angry with him.

Saran continued,

> before, you remember, I take care of her daughter when Gunangi at work – I treat her daughter like one of mine. When I leave my daughters with her she always shouting at them and she give the best food for her daughter, now I don't leave them with her anymore, but very difficult now, I cannot go out because I must stay with the children. Why she do like this?

Ever since the birth of Asanka's son in 2010, Saran complains that Lasantha's parents no longer pay any attention to her children, so she doesn't like to leave them there as often as she would have in the past. This has led to some tension between Saran and Lasantha's parents. Saran's daughters are now fifteen and thirteen, and she has a five year old son. Asanka's son was almost three years old at the time of writing. Problems sometimes developed between women and their spouse's parents, particularly their spouse's mother. For many newly-weds, the absence of a house of their own for the initial months or years of their married life, means that women end up living with their husband's parents during this time. Apart from a lack of privacy and control over their domestic setting, newly-wed women find themselves taking on a large share of the household chores.

Chalana, Saran's younger brother, married Rosy in 2012, a labourer's daughter from a village further inland. As the only male child in the family, Chalana will inherit his parents' home. Lasantha explained to me that Rosy has taken over most household chores from her mother-in-law, and he suggests that this is an important period in which to verify whether she is hard-working and whether she is capable of managing domestic responsibilities. Rosy is well respected by the family and other

villagers for the dutiful way in which she goes about her work and the jovial attitude she adopts in doing so. However, most women I have spoken to in Po have described feeling exploited by their spouse's parents during their time living with them. The good relations that exist between Rosy and Chalana's mother are influenced by two factors. Firstly, Chalana and his family members have often emphasised Rosy's background of poverty. For Rosy to be in charge of a house that is considerably larger than her previous home, is seen by her parents-in-law as a significant elevation in status. Secondly, it is unlikely that Chalana and Rosy will ever move out of his parents' house, as the property will eventually be passed on to him. It is thus, in Rosy's interest to maintain amicable domestic relations with his parents. As an outsider to the village, and a newcomer in the family, Rosy may draw on the close relations she has nurtured with Chalana's parents to appeal for help in domestic and marital issues. This is commonly the case with women who permanently share a home with their spouse's parents/family. In another example from Po, Dhammika, a fisherman and the youngest of three brothers, had eloped with Madara, a young woman from a poor family in the next village. The couple had stayed away from the village for a month following their elopement. When they returned Dhammika was publicly beaten by his elder brothers before being allowed back into the house. The beating was a reprimand by his brothers. Such a reaction was common practice when an elopement took place in the village. The brothers signalled their disapproval of his actions, scolded him for having made their mother worry, and admonished him for not having sought out their approval or advice. Dhammika's older brother, Donald, had later revealed to me that they were actually happy that Dhammika had eloped, as the family had no money to help pay for a wedding ceremony. Dhammika's brothers also approved of Madara and were happy that their widowed mother now had help and company around the house. Madara became close with Dhammika's mother and brothers. Following the birth of their first child, Dhammika began spending many nights away from the home and Madara became suspicious that he was having an affair. She used her close relations with Dhammika's family and her status as a new mother, to complain to his brothers and request their intervention. Dhammika was quickly persuaded to spend more nights at home as a result.

Women who marry outside their village manage to negotiate a place in their new households, as well as forming strong relations with their spouse's family. Children play an important role in the confirmation of a woman's place and power in a household. In mid- March 2013, I had just moved back into a room at Lasantha's house, just above his guest house. I was sitting in the family room with Lasantha and Saran, drinking tea. The children were playing in the back area and the television was blaring away in the background. I was talking to Lasantha about Chaminda (his *massinā*), whose wife had recently left him and returned to her family home in Kurunegala. Chaminda is a soft-

spoken and jolly man in his mid-thirties. He is a diver who regularly goes fishing to supplement his weekly income as a diver. He and his wife were unable to have children and had been trying to adopt for years without success – they wanted a baby that was not older than three months, so that the child would grow up thinking they were its natural parents. Chaminda and his wife also wanted the full experience of raising a child from as close to the start as possible.

In the beginning of 2012, when I had first started out on fieldwork, I had been approached by Chaminda and asked if I knew of anyone who might be able to help him and his wife adopt. As it happened, I had worked closely in previous years with the head of two orphanages, one in Galle district and another in Hambantota district. I gave my contact a call and we set up an appointment for the following week. Chaminda asked me to accompany him, his wife and his sister-in-law to the meeting in Galle and I gladly obliged. I woke up early that morning and had a tea at Lasantha's house from where Chaminda was supposed to pick me up in his three-wheeler. Lasantha strolled up to me in a colourful sarong and, with a cheeky grin and an equally cheeky nudge of his elbow, he told me, 'If you cannot manage, don't worry, you tell Chaminda I will help his wife make the baby', at which he burst into peels of laughter before adding, 'I can be her baby, she can feed me milk', at which he made a gesture simulating his latching on to her breasts and feeding, before swaggering off whilst chuckling to himself. On numerous occasions when I had been out with Lasantha, Chaminda and other men of the same age group, such jokes and mocking were commonplace. Children are an important part of family life that define the domestic space. Children may be used as leverage in married life for a woman to dissuade her husband from drinking and to allow her to make demands of the husband, such as to get him to spend more time around the house. In fact, on many occasions when the men retreat for a drink, Chaminda is always visibly more relaxed than the other men when evening turns into night, and the wives start calling for them to return home. When I have asked 'well what about Chaminda, he is also married?' Lasantha has responded with, 'yes, but he has no children'. His wife will still complain but not as vehemently as others, the absence of children robs her of a solid platform on which to make claims in the domestic space. She can however, refuse to cook for Chaminda or carry out the domestic duties, if the situation becomes unbearable.

In March 2013, Chaminda's wife returned to her family home in Kurunegala, unable to cope with Chaminda's constant drinking. Upon being told by Chaminda and Lasantha, I expressed concern, at which both of them burst out laughing and Lasantha said, 'he is happy, no problem. Now he can drink when he wants and he can do what he like. No wife, no problem', at which he shot a quick glance behind him to make sure his own wife was not within earshot. Chaminda explained that his

only problem was he had nobody to cook for him, even though before her departure, his wife would sometimes refuse to cook if he insisted on drinking. After his wife left, Lasantha and other friends and family took it in turn to give Chaminda food and lunch packets, a favour he would return with gifts of fish.

Saran argues that because Lasantha is the middle son he is in the least privileged position – the first son, the eldest brother Sunil, is revered because he is the first born, he is the first to receive aid from the parents and he will likely take over his father's role when Hamzi is too old. It is up to Sunil to further the family's interests, but Saran says that his consciousness of this aspect and the preferential treatment he receives, allows him to assume that he will be able to get away with almost anything. The changing context of social relations in post-tsunami Sri Lanka indicates that power and influence are essentially hinged on the range of relationships one maintains. This range includes village relations and extends to relations with outsiders who eventually may become internalised into family and community structures. In the case of Asanka, as the youngest son, it is his responsibility to take care of his parents in their old age and the family home [*gedara*]. Saran believes that Lasantha's exclusion also affects the way she is treated, notwithstanding the fact that her family are from the same village and her father, a diver/fisherman, is an important source of local support for Hamzi and his sons. Saran's father, Ratnasiri, is also from the same caste group as Lasantha's family, the *durāva* caste (often associated with toddy tappers). Most of the villagers in Po are from the *durāva* or *karava* (commonly associated with fishermen, in this area) castes. However, on inquiry caste affiliations are allegedly no longer taken into consideration – most of the youths I talked to claim to have no idea of their castes, what the castes mean or how they are supposed to affect their lives, if at all. In a conversation with Hamzi, Lasantha's father, he mentioned that the families from Po were all of the *durāva* caste – but he said that he was younger, caste affected the selection of marriage partners. He indicated that livelihood choice was not dictated by caste. He told me that *durāva* was associated with coconut cultivation. My informants never shared any further information on caste.

In order to compensate for the lack of financial aid from his father, Lasantha has had to rely on the friendships created with outsiders and *massinā*, such as Chaminda, in securing aid and investment in his business. There is also a degree of co-operation and solidarity between Lasantha and his brothers. Lasantha has created a network of close relations with affluent outsiders who are mainly foreigners, as well as relations with other locals who stand to benefit from the added business these foreign visitors bring to the locality. Lasantha has a number of loyal foreign friends who visit at various times throughout the year, every year, and who stay at his guest house. He is careful to

direct them to establishments, such as restaurants, belonging to other villagers who are part of his group of people [*kattiya*]. In return, when they encounter foreign, as well as local visitors, they will reciprocate by sending them to Lasantha's establishment first as opposed to his brothers. In most cases they will escort the visitors to the establishment themselves, so there is no doubt in Lasantha's mind that they are promoting his business. In doing so, they are also allowing other villagers to see them openly supporting Lasantha, and thus they make a clear public statement about where their loyalties lie. The latter is an important point, as a number of village men have repeatedly told me that people will say anything to please others, thus it is necessary to show their intent through actions. In the example at the beginning of this chapter, it was not enough for Lasantha and his family to say that they had switched political party alliance, they had to place the party banner outside their homes and show everyone.

When Asanka sought to purchase land from his uncle, he began his narrative to me by underlining the tensions that existed between him and his uncles as a result of the competition for tourism oriented business and activities. Asanka expected that following the tsunami, once solidarity between him and his uncles had been re-established, the obligations attached to such family relationships would also be re-established. It would seem that family obligations in this context are generally ordered around the management of land and resources. It has been noted by anthropologists studying Sri Lankan kinship (Tambiah 1958; 1965, Leach 1965, Yalman 1967, Robinson 1975) that all children, regardless of sex or order of birth, will receive an equal share of inheritance. Although this is generally understood to be the case in theory in both Po and Thomale, it is rarely so in practice. Land is always split between the male siblings, often in unequal shares, and women are given a dowry at their wedding of jewellery, furniture or sums of money. This is largely due to the preference for *diiga* marriages and, the need and desire to keep land (household plots in the case of Po and Thomale) attached to the family and for women to have movable currency or assets.

Division of inheritance between brothers is rarely ever equal. In families where Ego has more than two sons division of inheritance seems to be predicated on an evaluation by the father of his sons' individual financial situation and their future opportunities. For example, Hamzi, the eldest of three brothers, received no inheritance from his father. Lasantha and Sunil have suggested that this is probably due to the fact that Hamzi is considerably older than his brothers, and he had secured a prestigious job as a bank security guard that often saw him posted far from the village. Thus, Hamzi's job reduced his possibilities for getting involved in village life as a result of his frequent absence from the area. In addition, his brothers had expressed the desire to go into the tourism

business in Po, and they had no capital to start them off on this venture. Thushara, the youngest, inherited his father's guest house and a shop, whilst Sunny received land in Po for a guest house and land in Matara (their father was aware of the seasonality and uncertainty of the tourist business, and the shop and land in Matara served as security for times of scarcity). Thus, Hamzi's father may have been providing his sons with an equal start in life according to their individual needs. Similarly, Sunil and Asanka have both received considerable aid from their father. Hamzi purchased Sunil's land for him and financed the construction of his guest house, and Asanka is assured of receiving his parents' house.

Saran provided me with an alternative explanation. She claimed that due to Sunil's habitual drinking and disinterest in work, he received a guest house as it was unlikely that he would have had the capital to do so on his own. His guest house is positioned between his parents' home and Lasantha's guest house, fifty metres from either one. Saran suspects that this is for Hamzi to be able to keep an eye on him, as well as for Lasantha to help him with guests when the need arises. She says that it is understandable that Asanka should inherit the house since he will be caring for his parents when they are older. Saran was angry about Hamzi's lack of support for Lasantha. She said, 'Lasantha get nothing, and then Hamzi always tell him to help his brothers with the business. We have three children and our own business, we cannot do everything.' Saran explained that she cannot understand Lasantha's complete exclusion, but explains it by stating that Lasantha has always had numerous friends, both local and foreign, and has always been able to draw financial support from outside his immediate family. Although the latter explanation is plausible, my own feeling is that fathers in Hamzi's situation would not be able to split property and land equally between sons without having to sell it off first. Reducing the size of plots of land in such a way also reduces the status and independence that comes with them (see Watson 1985: 106-116 for a similar example in South China), and that is necessary for retaining a family's standing and influence.

Family relations in Po appear to be hinged on obligations (mainly financial), and more specifically obligations between male relatives. Fathers and elder brothers acquire status through seniority, and what seems to be a generally accepted notion that they represent the interests of the family. However, it is clear from the conflicts that emerge over inheritance and unreciprocated aid, that stringent family obligations are more likely to cause bitterness between the family members involved. This emerges clearly in Asanka's statement that Sunny isn't really family, following Sunny's refusal to keep his end of the bargain in the sale of the land, even though both Sunny and Thushara aided their nephews numerous times in the aftermath of the tsunami. Asanka expresses preference for his relationship with Gareth, which is based on amity, mutual interests and reciprocity. Kin

relations are not necessarily characterised by financial obligations, though in some cases they could be, rather, in this context, a close degree of male consanguinity entails obligations that are often detrimental to the junior individual, as well as to ensuring continuing relations of kinship.

Family, friends and kinship

Chaminda is Lasantha's cross-cousin [*massinā*]. Lasantha also refers to him as his mango friend [*amba yaluwa*]. *Amba* normally means mango, but I have been told by a number of locals that it is an older term for water, where it was explained to me to mean two friends who are inseparable like water flowing in one direction.[18] It is worth noting that other locals have claimed that *amba* actually does simply mean mango, and the expression denotes a sweet relationship. In either case, the term refers to a close relationship and seems to be used to elevate and distinguish a particular friendship from the more commonly known kinship designations. For example, Lasantha and Chaminda meet on a daily basis and drink together at various points throughout the week. Lasantha occasionally employs Chaminda as a boat driver to take out his guests for river trips, sightseeing, and diving. Chaminda will often take a part of his catch over to Lasantha to be cooked for guests, where unless he is in dire need of money he will provide the fish for free or at a greatly reduced price. Lasantha will reciprocate by providing free alcohol and food on days when small parties or drinking gatherings are organised between guests and/or other friends. Such exchanges are not necessarily of economic benefit to either party, rather, it is an exercise in regular gift exchange that constantly reaffirms the bond between them and the reciprocity that their relationship entails; their inseparability and companionship is paralleled by their reciprocal use of each other's commodities through the process of gift exchange.

Chaminda is also Sunil's *amba yaluwa*, an odd situation given that Sunil and Lasantha, although brothers who enjoy close relations, are in direct competition with one another when it comes to their respective businesses. Chaminda is careful to split his support of their businesses evenly and the fact that he is described as being both Lasantha's and Sunil's *amba yaluwa* strengthens the relationship between the brothers and acts as a point of mediation when troubles or minor conflicts arise between them over business. For example, on occasions when Sunil had neglected his guests, leaving Lasantha to deal with them, Chaminda shared the resulting work with Lasantha, often performing errands and taking guests fishing along the coast. The family obligation to

[18] Although amba is translated as mango, my informants have insisted that this is not the meaning of the term in this case. It has been suggested to me that perhaps here *amba* is a shortened version of *jalamba*

unquestioningly aid his older brother could possibly become a source of bitterness for Lasantha, were it not for the help Chaminda provides in alleviating the burden where possible. I have also noticed that when Sunil and Lasantha have had disagreements, Chaminda spends time with each brother separately and on at least two occasions I have witnessed Chaminda providing a bottle of *arrack* to get the brothers to sit down together.

The *massinā* relationship is an important one and in Po and Thomale the term is normally used between men of the same age group. Leach (1961) notes that there is a moral obligation between *massinā* to support each other and that the relationship is informal and characterised by joking. Unlike between siblings, the *massinā* relationship is understood to be one of equality and reciprocity. In Sri Lankan kinship terminology *massinā* refers to cross-cousins, sister's husbands and wives' brothers. In Po and in Thomale, the term *massinā* is also used to denote the relationship between men who share a sense of belonging together, either through friendship, work or family. Although Ego may refer to many other men as his *massinā*, he will rarely ever refer to more than one person as his *amba yaluwa*. Thus, *amba yaluwa* is a term adopted to elevate an individual relationship, and distinguish it from other relations. Terms such as *amba yaluwa*, demonstrate what Sahlins (2011) refers to as a 'mutuality of being', and that he defines as:

> Persons who are members of one another, who participate intrinsically in each other's existence. 'Mutuality of being' applies as well to the constitution of kinship by social construction as by procreation, even as it accounts for 'the mysterious effectiveness of relationality' (Vivieros de Castro), how it is that relatives live each other's lives and die each other's deaths (Sahlins 2011:2).

The use of the term *massinā* in Po and Thomale illustrates individuals' actual and desired relationships. Clough (2007), following on Carsten (2000) and Strathern (1986) with regards to the linkages between biology and kinship, states that '…kinship constitutes a set of local terms employed in discursive strategies as part of individuals' responses to the political and cosmological systems in which they find themselves' (Clough 2007: 147). In Thomale, *massinā* is used to refer to relationships with other men, with whom there is close camaraderie in everyday life. The use of the term *massinā* in Thomale is a clear indicator of what Sahlins describes as a 'mutuality of being'. Men (and boys) grow up together, go to the same schools, live in the same streets, work together, suffer hardship together, go fishing, socialise and eat together. Janet Carsten notes how in 'parts of Southeast Asia, the medium through which houses and people are tied to each other, and to the soil, is rice' (Carsten 2000: 56). In Thomale, men are bound together in kinship through the work and lifestyle attached to fishing. Carsten goes on to say that through the act of sharing food and living

together over time, people form relationships that adopt the character of kinship. Her point is similar to Sahlins' argument that kinship is not solely about biological relations, but also incorporates socially constructed relationships that emerge from a mutual sense of belonging together. In Thomale I have shown how villagers utilise the kin idiom to emphasise togetherness and relationality, so much so, that men who regard each other as *massinā* even envisage their children getting married. Through the union of their children they construct a biological relationship on top of the existing social relationship and further cement their kinship.

Both Leach (1961) and Alexander (1995) emphasise the close relationship that exists between brothers and brothers-in-law. It is from these relationships, I posit, that factions are formed. Boissevain (2013) defines a faction as '[a] loosely ordered group in conflict with a similar group over a particular issue' (2013: 29). For Leach the 'effective *pavula*' served as a political faction and was largely based on the relations formed with brothers-in-law, where the strains of family hierarchy visible between brothers were not as pronounced. The latter is reflected in the use of the terms younger brother [*malli*] and elder brother [*ayiya*], instead of simply brother (Leach 1961: 106-108). I have loosely defined *kattiya* here as faction, that is, as a group of similar individuals ordered around a common cause, goal, or function. For example, the co-operative group of fishermen in Thomale, set up by Toni and described earlier in this chapter, has been described to me by its members as a *kattiya*. The men in this group, together with their families, are bound together through work, friendship and kinship. Stirrat has described *kattiya* as 'a group recruited through patrifiliation' (1977: 281). Descriptions of the concept *kattiya* in Po and Thomale are similar to Leach's definition of the 'effective *pavula*', that is, a group of men bound by a bond of kinship and a moral obligation to aid each other. Podi, a part-time fisherman from Thomale, explained *kattiya* as, 'all the friends and family who help you'. Where locals of Po and Thomale's application of the word *kattiya* differs from Leach's 'effective *pavula*' and Stirrat's definition of *kattiya*, is that it is not limited to consanguines. Members of a *kattiya* need not be genealogically related in the formal sense.

The term *pavula* has a similarly flexible usage. It may be used to refer to one's wife, the nuclear family, or the whole village (Leach 1961; Brow 1988). The varied application of the term *pavula* is indicative of the variability in local notions of relationality, and highlights the intersection between the categories of family and kinship. The latter comes across in Leach's definition of the term:

> *Pavula* has much the same range of meanings as the English word 'family'. At the smallest scale it could mean simply one woman and her children or even simply 'my wife'; at the other extreme it might mean 'kinsmen' in the widest sense (Leach 1961: 105).

The use of the term *pavula* in this manner highlights the fluid nature of the concept of kin [*näyō*] and the fluctuating political structure and context of social relationships. Leach writes that, '[t]he effective *pavula*, from some points of view, is simply a small-scale political faction in which the ties to the leader are expressed in kinship terms' (Leach 1961: 117). Stirrat notes that, in '[t]he broad framework in which overall intra-village differences are conceptualized, the *kattiyas* are seen as conglomerations of *pavula*, and the *pavula* are the active units within the *kattiya*' (Stirrat 1977: 282). As I have illustrated, kinship terminology is used in both Po and Thomale to also highlight desired and/or perceived social relationships. For example, I outlined earlier that Subha is Toni's *māmā*, but they refer to each other as *massinā*. There is a biological relationship that connects them within a family hierarchy, but their social relationship is that of equals and friends, and this is highlighted by the use of *massinā* to refer to one another. Spencer (2007) states that, '[f]actional analysis concerned itself with the vertical ties between leaders and followers. In describing these ties, the assumption tended to be that people mobilize politically in response to perceptions of their own self-interest' (Spencer 2007: 37). Spencer draws this observation from a reading of Hardiman's (1982) critical analysis of factional studies combined with decades of his own fieldwork focusing on political organisation at both village and national level in Sri Lanka. While factions [*kattiya*] in Thomale are organised around fishing activities and male brotherhood, in Po, factions are organised around competing groups in the acquisition of coastal land earmarked for tourism activities and the development of luxury properties for foreigners. Following the tsunami of 2004, the increased availability of coastal land in Po, as well as the increased investment in a tourism oriented micro-economy, led to an increase in the number of tourist visitors in the area and foreign expats buying land and moving into the village. This shift has led to the creation of a denser sociality between foreigners and locals. Some of these relationships are described by locals using the kin idiom in which, some foreigners are also treated as members of a *kattiya*. In the following section I provide some case study examples from Po.

Foreign friends, local partnerships

Case Study 1

Lucien and Sabine went to Sri Lanka for the first time together in December 2009. They had both taken early retirement and were looking to settle somewhere in Asia for a few years. They explained to me that they had been drawn to Asia by the low cost of living, the warm climate, and a setting that was completely different from, what they perceived as, the monotony of life back home in

Belgium. Lucien was then in his late 50s and Sabine in her late 40s. They had gone to Po for a short visit and on their first day there they met Asanka on the beach. They took an instant liking to him. He introduced them to his brother Lasantha, and offered them accommodation at his parents' home for the duration of their stay. Whilst at Hamzi's home, Lucien inquired about the cost of purchasing land in the village, as well as the availability of coastal land. Asanka told them he would take them round the area the following day and show them the houses and available land. Lucien related how together with Sabine, he was led to a stretch of coastal land in the nearby village of Madagama, close to the home of Asanka's distant cousin. Asanka then introduced Lucien to another expat couple living in the same village, Peter and Julia. Asanka had helped Peter find and purchase a house in Madagama in 2007, and had introduced him to Lucien to serve as his character reference.

Lucien and Sabine immediately took a liking to the land and within a week had arranged for the purchase of the plot through Asanka. The money would be transferred from Belgium and the land would be registered in Asanka's name. As noted in chapter 3, foreigners can buy residential property in Sri Lanka if they provide proof of having provided a significant financial/service contribution to the country. The other option available is the payment of a hundred per cent tax on the value of the property they purchase. In order to avoid these added expenses some foreigners enter into partnerships with locals who act as their brokers and the property is registered under their local broker's name. Foreign expats I have talked to have reciprocated this aid in different ways. For instance, an Austrian lady who also lived in Madagama between 2006 and 2010, gave her local broker, Susantha, a pre-agreed upon lump sum of money (I never found out how much). From what I have been told this is common practice in other villages along the coast, but not so common in Po. Asanka and Lasantha had sneered at this sort of agreement and Lasantha had told me in reference to Susantha that 'these people very greedy, they only want the money. We want the friendship'. Between 2006 and 2013, Lasantha and his brothers had brokered the sale of twelve plots of land in the villages of Po and Madagama. Asanka had organised the construction of nine different houses on behalf of the foreigners they met and befriended. In addition, another four local families had entrusted Asanka with the management and sale of their land, in the hope that he might successfully broker a deal for them with foreigners. With most of the foreign expats the brothers had befriended, and for whom they had built or acquired properties, relations between them were governed by acts of reciprocity. For instance, some foreign expats only used their village homes for a month each year when they came on holiday. In exchange for help in securing the land/property and registering it under their name, these expats would allow the brothers to rent out the property during the remainder of the year and keep the profits for themselves. Resident expats who spent most of the year in the village would reciprocate by performing small favours for the

brothers, such as lending them money in low-season, or tutoring their children in English, French or Maths. In return, Lasantha and his brothers looked after their property, and ensured that they were treated fairly by other locals. The brothers, together with friends and cousins, would often socialise with many of the expats they had befriended, to the point of taking trips together to other parts of Sri Lanka.

After Lucien had decided on the purchase of the land, he asked Asanka about the best way to go about building his house. Lucien and Sabine explained what they wanted to build and how much they were willing to invest. They finally arranged for Asanka to oversee the construction of the house. In the meantime the couple returned to Belgium to settle their affairs and prepare for the move. Lucien told me that he was very nervous about the whole affair and whilst in Belgium remembers telling his wife, 'Ah that's it, we will go back and find a big sign saying thank you for all the money.' However, he received a phone call from Asanka who informed him that they had found a better piece of land further down the beach and had bought that instead. Asanka then requested a large sum of money be wired to him to begin construction, and Lucien, hesitantly obliged. Lucien told me,

> Anything could have happened, eh? We had only met them, and we trusted them with a lot of our money. I expected to come back after three months and find that nothing had been done, but the foundation was there, and the walls and the first floor. They said it would take another three months to finish, so in the meantime we stayed at their parents' house.

They built a European style house, with fully equipped kitchen, air-conditioned bedrooms and a living room, a swimming pool and a vast lawn garden with a barbeque area leading down to the beach. Around the time they were trying to decide whether to buy the land or not, another expat, Gareth, was down on a visit and Lucien said,

> He helped make up our mind about the family. He told us he had known them for years, and we already felt safer after hearing that. We were very lucky I think to meet this family – they are like our family. They make sure we have everything we need – it is the easy life.

Lucien and Gareth have remained close friends since their first meeting. Lucien has a good relationship with many locals, especially with Lasantha, and they escape together every now and again for a few drinks and a meal. Lasantha and his family are regularly invited for meals at Lucien's home, and their children are invited to use the pool. Lasantha reciprocates by inviting Lucien and Sabine for lunch, and unlike with tourists at his guest house, his wife and children also join and eat at the same table. Lasantha says of these occasions, 'with other foreigners, it's very difficult and we

cannot do like this. They don't like that our family join them, sometimes they look afraid. Others not good with the children, but Lucien he know.' On other occasions throughout the week, Sunil and Lasantha, together with close friends, visit Lucien for a few drinks. On these occasions Lasantha tells his wife, Saran, that he is going over to talk to neighbours on Lucien's behalf, rather than admit that he is going drinking. Saran told me, 'It is ok when he goes to Lucien, I know when Sabine there she control both of them.' In April 2013, Lucien told me that they cannot imagine living anywhere else, 'We are used to it now, the people know us, the family is like our family – we feel safe here'.

Lucien and Sabine are regarded as being an extension of Lasantha's family. Lasantha told me, 'With him I trust all. If he tell me to jump, I will jump, I trust him.' Although Lucien is considerably older than Lasantha, he is still referred to as his *massinā*. Lucien and Sabine are very careful not to get involved in any of the family's domestic affairs, but are quick to aid Lasantha and other members of his group [*kattiya*] in external disputes. For example, in late 2012, Lasantha was accused by a rival of harassing a foreign woman on the beach. Lucien was quick to escort Lasantha down to the police station to issue a statement to the effect that Lasantha was in fact with him and the charges against him were false.

When Lucien and Asanka first met, they had spent over two weeks in each other's company during which they visited land plots, talked to landowners, negotiated prices and shared ideas between themselves. Lucien and Sabine also lived and ate with Asanka and his family and on most evenings socialised and drank with his brothers and friends. Upon returning to Sri Lanka they spent a further three months living with Hamzi and Asanka. They worked and socialised together, lived together and ate together. Once they moved into their own house and settled into the village life, they became a regular part of locals' everyday lives and had a social network of their own. Lucien often helped Lasantha and Sunil approach and talk to tourists on the beach and promoted their business whenever he visited other areas of Sri Lanka. Although the kin idiom is used to refer to Lucien, the relationship is one of friendship and reciprocity. Lasantha states that although the relationship is a close one, he knows that Lucien will move back to Europe at some point, like many foreign expats do. His relationship with Lucien is also characterised by constraints. Lasantha refrains from sharing details of family and local conflicts with Lucien and is especially careful not to involve him in situations that might cause him discomfort. While both enjoy the other's company and engage in acts of gift giving and friendship, there is no expectation of either to become involved in the other's personal affairs. Furthermore, the brothers' initial approach when dealing with foreign buyers is to make a commission off the sale of the land. Lucien, in turn, benefits from having local contacts and

security for his investment through their protection. These continual acts of reciprocity are transactions in a relationship based primarily on mutual interest.

Case Study 2

Lasantha had been taking care of a beach house belonging to a British couple, Roger and Anne, for over a decade. The couple lived in Manchester and had come to the village for the first time some fifteen years before when they had bought the land. Lasantha told me they were the first foreigners to buy property in the village. They purchased a bungalow with three rooms, a kitchen, gazebo and a part of the beach. When they first passed through the village, they met Lasantha, and through him, met his family and other villagers. They had only visited the island on a few occasions in the last decade. During their absence, the couple had wanted Lasantha to take care of the property, but his father intervened and instructed Lasantha to let Sunil take charge. Any profits from the renting of rooms would go to Sunil with small amounts being given to Lasantha and their cousin Donald, according to their level of involvement.

Roger and his wife had decided to return for a visit and holiday in 2010 and informed Sunil weeks in advance. However, when they arrived Sunil had forgotten about them and had rented the rooms out to tourists. Saran explained:

> He give them another place, but they very angry, they want to stay their place. Sunil don't care about them, he never take care of them when they here. Mr. Roger he don't want Sunil, he want Lasantha there, but father give to Sunil because he the older brother. They very angry, after that they say they sell the place.

Sunil was confronted by the couple on their arrival. They were furious to find other guests in their beach house and the property in disarray. Sunil was angered by the couple's reaction to his oversight, and stormed off stating that he didn't want anything more to do with the beach house. Roger spoke to Lasantha and asked him to look after the beach house instead of Sunil. Roger and his wife kept their distance from Sunil for the rest of their holiday and then they returned to the UK in anger. In 2011 they contacted Lasantha and informed him that they intended to sell the property. Lasantha told Roger that he was interested in buying the beach house, and as a result Roger said he would sell the property to him at half the intended selling price, if he could come up with the money by their next visit in December 2012. If Lasantha had not collected the money by this time, he would advertise the sale of the beach house. Lasantha would have to come up with 3.5million rupees (around 21,000 euros).

Throughout the course of 2012, Lasantha scrambled to collect the money he needed. He appealed to friends and attempted to get loans from banks without any success. He even considered selling his van. Then in August 2012, Jenny, an Australian woman who had bought a property by the beach in 2008, contacted Lasantha to inform him that she was returning to see what had happened with her property. When she had bought the property in 2008, she had done so on a whim. She had met Lasantha in 2007 but had not sought to consult with him or any of his family and had bought the house from another local, Dumintha. The property was registered under her name, but I was never able to find out from her how she had gone about this. After she had purchased the land, a thirty year old man, Duncan, from the village of Kamburugamuwa befriended her and she employed him as her security guard for the property. Unbeknown to her, he was connected to a well-known local politician, and as a result he had become a very powerful man in his area.

Duncan slowly appropriated the property and when she returned in 2010 to oversee the property's refurbishment, she found that Duncan had been practically living there and had had friends over to drink on numerous occasions. There were rumours among many of the local men and especially youths, that the property had been turned into a brothel on certain days of the month. They had a confrontation and Duncan threatened Jenny and drove her out of the house, having already taken most of her possessions and furniture. According to villagers who live close by, there was nothing she could do. Duncan was claiming ownership of the land and the police were hesitant to get involved because of his connections. She left the village vowing never to return, but as her investment in the property came to a halt and the property fell into a further state of abandon, Duncan lost interest in it and returned to his village. Lasantha phoned Jenny and informed her of his departure and she planned to return in September 2012.

When Jenny returned, she rented a house on the beach belonging to another expat, Mattias, whose house was under Lasantha's care. It was a few hundred metres down from where her property was situated. Lasantha was hoping to get some help with a loan from Jenny as a reward for his help. His deadline for purchasing the beach house was drawing near and he had almost accumulated the sum he needed through combining money from the sale of a plot of his land and with a little financial aid he had received from two foreign expat friends. Jenny wanted to renovate her property and rent it out, as well as use it as a holiday home. She was approached by a local teacher whilst shopping in Matara town and, as the conversation between them progressed, she told him about her renovation plans. The teacher, Thushara, told her that he had taken care of numerous construction projects locally and knew the lawyers and government officials from whom permits needed to be obtained. Prior to her meeting with Thushara, Asanka had approached her in the hope of taking care of the

renovation, as he had done with other foreign owned houses. He had quoted a price of 8 lakh (around 4840 Euros) for the works and they were close to making a formal agreement. In her conversation with Thushara however, she mentioned her deal with Asanka and the price he had quoted, at which Thushara said he could do the necessary work quicker and for 1lakh less. She accepted. Asanka was furious and made the following threat: 'Thushara don't know us, otherwise he don't do like this. But he will know us soon'.

Lasantha had told Jenny about his intention to buy Roger's beach house, and about being hard up for cash with the deadline approaching. He had managed to collect two and a half million rupees through the sale of a plot of land on which he had hoped to build a house at some point in the future. He had saved up money from his business over the year and had received 1 lakh from Helen, an elderly Austrian expat living in the village. Lucien had also lent him a small amount. He still hadn't sold the van, and wanted to delay doing so, since he made a substantial profit from airport trips and tours (he would charge 12,000rupees per day for the tours, and 13,000rupees for an airport trip). Jenny was only in the village for a month and would return at the end of the year. She agreed to loan Lasantha 7 lakh with the proviso that he pick her up from the airport and take her on tours for free until the amount had been paid back. He also had to keep an eye out on her property and give her an update every couple of weeks on the progress of the works. She informed him that she would wire the money to Thushara who would then pass it on to him. He accepted under some duress.

Lasantha said, 'she want me to be cleaning boy, but I have my business. I need the money for beach house, but I don't like this, I think Thushara big trouble.' Sure enough, a month after her departure from the village, Lasantha had still not received any money from Thushara or Jenny. He asked me to send her an email inquiring about the money and on answering she expressed surprise that Lasantha hadn't received any of the money as she had wired it to Thushara over three weeks before with clear instructions to forward the money to Lasantha. She gave us Thushara's number and Lasantha called him up immediately. He disappeared into the garden behind the kitchen to take the call, emerging a few minutes later visibly enraged. He walked up to me and spat out, 'he tell me he going to give me a little money every week. I go meet him 5pm near Sammanmal restaurant. You come, I also tell Asanka and Sunil.' I marched out behind him, following him the short distance to his parents' house; there he called on Asanka and told him what had happened in very agitated Sinhala. I waited patiently by the side, as both Lasantha and Asanka got on their phones and began calling people. Lasantha ran back home for his motor bike, and I hopped on and we sped off to the designated meeting spot. We arrived at the parking spot in front of the restaurant, which was located right in

the centre of the town, amidst all the traffic and hustle and bustle of the urban centre. Sunil had arrived together with their cousin, Chaminda, Asanka, Asanka's close friend and my landlord in Thomale, Suranji.

Suranji was now the big man in Thomale. He was a quiet, sullen looking man, with a few visible stab wounds on his arm and between his lower neck and collar bone. He was also a loan shark. He had known the brothers from their school days and had introduced Sunil indirectly to his now wife, Gunangi. Asanka had become close with Suranji in recent years, especially following his brief foray into local politics in 2009/2010, when he was running for Mayor of Matara town. He had pulled out of the race, overcome by the flood of requests for favours from people turning up at his doorstep on a daily basis. Asanka drew on Suranji's support when conflicts arose, since his reputation as a violent man was well-known. His presence was clearly meant to intimidate.

The group collected in front of the restaurant and as soon as Lasantha spotted Thushara on the other side of the road he walked up to him, followed at a short distance by his support group. He began talking to Thushara. After a minute had lapsed and without warning, the brothers, save for Asanka, and Chaminda had surrounded Thushara and Suranji had pinned him against the wall. As he cowered there, they each pushed their faces up against his and together completely covered him from outside view with their bodies. They spent a few minutes scolding him, following which Asanka, Lasantha and Suranji escorted him round the corner and returned a few minutes later with beaming smiles and seven lakh in Lasantha's hand. He was so overjoyed he invited everyone present to the restaurant for food and *arrack* as his treat.

Over numerous bottles of *arrack*, Asanka explained,

> He didn't know us. I told him I knew what he did to take the work away from me, and now he's trying to take my brother's money? Suranji ask him, 'you know me?' Then he very afraid, he say sorry many times – now he know who we are. I tell him, now you be careful, you don't cause trouble in our village again. He go bring the money, then running away.

At this they all burst out laughing.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided descriptions of social relationships in the coastal communities of Po and Thomale, as I observed them and as they were explained to me by locals, in a bid to clarify the

variability that exists between the different family and kinship designations. The information provided here does not reveal a rigid structure that applies to all members of the community, but rather provides examples of the processual character of kinship formed through mutual experience. The available literature on kinship in Sri Lanka points to the existence of a conceptual terminological structure of Sinhalese kinship that outlines desired unions between family members in supposedly endogamous caste/sub-caste groups (Leach 1961; Yalman 1967; Brow 1996). Some authors have argued that this system may be seen as a discursive tool to talk about property rights and land ownership. However, some (Obeyesekere 1967; Robinson 1975; Stirrat 1977; Spencer 1990a; Alexander 1995) have also indicated that the opening up of previously, and allegedly, endogamous villages, together with changing land reforms and a changing political structure at the national level, have led to moves away from traditional kinship organisation. This is also the result of shifts in village population size and increased mobility between village communities. In the cases I have presented here, villagers in both Po and Thomale appear to select *massinā* relationships and friendship over the more restrictive obligations attached to their relationships with immediate family members, in particular between brothers, fathers and sons, and between uncles and nephews.

In Thomale the extension of the term *massinā* to refer to individuals bound by common work, lifestyle, friendship, and brotherhood is reflective of Sahlins'(2011) assertion that kinship can be described as a 'mutuality of being'. Obeyesekere's (1967) description of the organisation and division of land, by the *vāsagama*, is in many ways reflective, at least in theory, of the mutuality of being inspiring such a system. Peasants owned and worked the land together, suffered the same hardship and joy, ate and lived together and married between them. Similarly, among the fishermen in Toni's co-operative system there was a sense of sharing each other's lives and experiences. The tragedy created by the tsunami wave, and the collective experience of being shunned by aid agencies, government officials, and surrounding communities had the effect of deepening this feeling of belonging to one another, and is reflected in Chamil's assertion that fishermen can only depend on each other. This feeling was so much so, that the co-operative system continued to be applied in the aftermath of the tsunami and was what aided many families in coping with the limited means of survival at their disposal. In Po, the experience of the tsunami was characterised by an increase in foreign visitors and foreign aid. Here again, locals express preference for relationships based on friendship and reciprocity, where even relationships with foreigners are expressed using the kin idiom. However, locals are conscious of the temporal nature of their relationships with foreigners, and the gulf that separates them. Additionally, the use of the kin idiom with foreigners, in some cases, seems to be a direct translation of the terms from Sinhala into English, without

necessarily reflecting the same meanings and attachments. Relationships with foreign expats are in some cases subject to constraints, suspicion and misunderstanding, especially where the possibility of profit exists. Rather than relations based on a mutuality of being, close relations with foreigners seem to be based on a mutuality of interest.

In the following chapter I take a closer look at how locals identify with their localities. How has the organisation of village space changed since the tsunami? And how have these changes affected people's day to day relationships? In order to answer these questions I take a closer look at the relationships between villagers of Po and Thomale, and at local expressions of individual and village identity. I also explore how the increase in tourism, and foreign expats, in Po has affected relations between locals and foreigners.

Chapter 5 – Relationships to place

> [R]elationships to places are lived most often in the company of other people, and it is on these communal occasions – when places are sensed *together* – that native views of the physical world become accessible to strangers (Basso 1996: 56)

Towards the end of January 2012, in my second week of fieldwork, I was living with Lasantha and his family at their guest house in Po, whilst I looked for a house to rent in Thomale. On this particular day, I had accompanied him to the beach house further down the coast where he was spending a few hours cleaning and conducting small repairs in and around the house. I had noted that occasionally he scanned the beach nervously for other people. Saran, his wife, had asked me that morning whether I would like to go and keep him company at the beach house and help him out. She was busy taking care of her children and their cousin and therefore could not join him. I had found it strange that she, and not Lasantha, had asked me to go, but I didn't dwell on it and hopped onto the back of his motorbike and we sped off down the coast. Once there, he swept the front porch of each room, then washed the red concrete floor down and began brushing the water to the side, shooting fleeting glances about him every now and again whilst he attempted to engage in small talk with me. I asked him about the people that had remained and those that had left the village since my last visit in 2010, then Saran pulled up to the gate in her brother's three-wheeler. She had left the children with her mother-in-law and had brought us some tea. Lasantha looked visibly more relaxed. He laid the broom against the wall of the house and sat down at the table for some tea.

I asked them both about the possibilities of getting a house in Thomale. They looked at each other momentarily and uneasily then Saran said, 'maybe better you stay somewhere in Po, Thomale not nice people sometimes and houses not so nice.' I gave them a puzzled look and asked, 'but don't you have many friends and family in Thomale?' Lasantha explained, 'Some family, but not close, you know like Toni and Podi, but other people sometimes problem.' Saran added, 'There are some nice people – but then when drinking – big problem.' She then proceeded to tell me how two months before they were at the same beach house, cleaning the rooms and changing the bed sheets, when a drunken fisherman from Thomale placed his head on top of the gate and called to Lasantha and demanded to be served food. Lasantha explained that he didn't have any food available and was

only there to clean. He pointed out to the fisherman that there was a restaurant further down the beach and they might be serving food there. The fisherman stated that he knew who Lasantha was and insisted that he be served by Lasantha, who retorted 'how do you want me to serve you food if I have none?' The man then heaved himself up over the wall, swearing at the couple and insisting again that Lasantha serve him food. Another three fishermen, also from Thomale, who had been drinking with him in the bare patch of land next to the beach house also began clambering over the wall. Lasantha again insisted that he had no food. Angered by his refusal to serve them, the first fisherman grabbed a bottle with the intention of beating Lasantha with it. Saran then stepped in between them, reasoning that they wouldn't beat her and shouted at Lasantha to run away. Apparently Lasantha didn't need much prompting and vaulted over the wall and ran away as one of the men hurled a hammer he had found lying close by. It missed Lasantha's head by a few inches. The fishermen left the beach house after and headed down the road, cursing and laughing as they walked away. The story having been told, Saran added, 'you see? This is what they are like.'

Villagers from Po had explained to me that there had been resentment between families from Po and Thomale since the tsunami. As I have stated in previous chapters, Thomale was side-lined from receiving relief aid after the tsunami, whereas many NGO projects and aid had been directed at Po. A few families and individuals in Po had benefited particularly well from the available aid, among them Lasantha and many of his family members and friends. The latter was possible because of a number of factors: their fluency in English enabled them to communicate with NGO members, their proximity to the beach and their prior involvement in tourism. Until late 2011 conflicts between members of the two villages had been kept under control through the direct intervention of Toni, who was then the Thomale village 'big man' (a term people from both villages employed). Toni was related to Sunil (Lasantha's brother) and his family through his sister (see Fig. 9 and 11 in Chapter 4) and he had benefited directly from this family connection through a share in some of their business transactions. For example, in 2008 he aided Lasantha in locating a piece of land in Thomale for a French couple to build their home on (see case study in Chapter 6), for which he received a commission on the sale of the land. The French couple were the only foreigners, apart from myself, who lived in Thomale. Furthermore, Toni was often invited to large drinking parties organised in Po by Lasantha, Sunil or Hamzi – to which Toni was also encouraged to bring along close friends from Thomale who were considered part of his *kattiya*. Through regular acts of socialisation and the regular consumption of food and alcohol between the men of both villages, a bond of kinship was established, making it easier to discourage conflicts between some rival families from the two villages.

In mid-2011 Toni had suffered serious health problems as a result of his excessive consumption of alcohol and as a result had lost most of his power and standing in Thomale (cf. Chapters 2 and 4). This situation had led to a deterioration of relations between some of the poorer fishing families (not associated with Toni), with some of the more well-off families in Po (particularly Lasantha and his family). Hamzi had suggested to me that the absence of Toni had allowed the Thomale families involved in a feud with them, to vent their frustrations at Hamzi's family's expense. Hamzi explained that these families and individuals were driven by envy [*irisiyāva*] at his family's ability to recover well from the tsunami. Brawls had broken out more frequently between members of both villages since Toni's illness, in and around popular drinking spots in between the two localities. This is not to say that there had never been fights between members of the two communities in restaurants and drinking hot spots bordering the villages. However, it was rare to have encounters during the day where people from one village would actively seek out and harass members of the other village. It was also unusual for violence to occur if men had not been drinking. Such acts could not be without consequences. The Thomale fisherman's assertion to Lasantha that he *knew* who he was indicates that he knew that Lasantha could no longer rely on Toni's influence and protection. Moreover, this was not simply a chance confrontation, a meeting and disagreement in the street or a public space. Rather, this was a direct intrusion on Lasantha's property. It was in this sense, a symbolic violation of a wider space, which encompassed Po which was in significant ways associated with Lasantha's family and under their influence. The more Lasantha and his family members took charge of more village property and land, the more his rivals wanted to challenge their control over that land.

On numerous occasions, Lasantha and his brothers had reminded me of the fact that Po was *their* village. In the incident at the beach house, the Thomale fisherman had demanded Lasantha prepare food for him, he had not directed this demand at Saran. This gesture Lasantha has found particularly insulting as the fisherman was attributing to Lasantha the role of a woman, that is, as someone he deemed vulnerable and inferior to him. The waning of Toni's influence made such an action possible in a way that would have been unthinkable previously.

Lasantha was thus being publicly effeminised and ridiculed and it was his wife who was left to stand up for him. It was a blatant attempt, by the fishermen, to demonstrate Lasantha's vulnerability and question his dominion over his space. In many ways the latter point reflects dominant post-tsunami discourse among villagers in Thomale which questioned Po villagers' rights to and distribution of aid. Arturo Escobar (2008) posits that place is to be defined by social relations and strategies that are shaped by the opportunities provided by the landscape in terms of migration in and out of the area, increased livelihood opportunities, as well as certain types of production that tie in landscape, kin

relations, and production relations (2008: 49-50). Escobar is here talking about the Process of Black Communities in Colombia's Pacific rainforest, where he illustrates the converging struggles between capitalists' intent on exploiting the rainforest's resources and 'place-based' groups, intent on protecting their area. There are clear parallels between Escobar's depictions of the resistance to neoliberal globalisation, and the critique offered by Klein (2007), Gunawardena (2008), Schuller (2008), and Gamburd (2014), on neoliberal strategies in reconstruction following the tsunami in Sri Lanka and how these have led to resistance and unintended consequences. Here too, we find place simultaneously defining opportunity, social relations and difference, as well as, in turn, being defined by them. The disaster literally flattened the land and a flood of development followed and restructured it and the social relations around land.

Escobar's definition of place sits well in the context of post-tsunami coastal Sri Lanka and provides a departure point for explaining tensions between individuals and families in Po and Thomale. Many Thomale villagers felt they were the genuine victims of the tsunami and that people from Po had intentionally profited at their expense. For example, I was invited to my neighbour's house in late April 2012 for some New Year's sweets of oil cake [*kævum*] and milk rice [*kiri bāth*]. There were two other local friends of his and a young man, Gamini, who lived in the house almost directly in front of my own. Gamini had never spoken to me before. His family had been feuding with Lasantha's for many years and my occupation of Suranji's house clearly displeased them.[19] The men had been drinking when I arrived and shortly after I had sampled some of the treats being offered me, Gamini pulled up a chair beside me. He reeked of *arrack*. Grabbing the back of my chair with one hand he went off on an unintelligible rant, half in Sinhala and half in broken English. The other men patted him on the arm and repeatedly told him to leave me be. Gamini paused momentarily, then turned and spat out: 'Sunil is a dick [*pakäya*]. He sleeps with the foreigners for money, then they give him the land.' Following some muffled words to the other two men who were trying to calm him, he stated angrily that the only reason Sunil had married Gunangi was to get Toni. One of the men then grabbed Gamini in a half embrace and escorted him away mumbling and cursing. The latter incident, together with other occasions where villagers expressed similar irritation, led me to believe that families in Thomale felt thrice cheated. Firstly, Thomale villagers had been excluded from receiving aid. Secondly, they had also been prevented from lucrative encounters with foreigners because their village was unattractive to foreigners. Finally, as a result of the connections with Toni and his people [*kattiya*], outsiders from Po were interfering in their own lives. Toni had prevented some villagers from drinking in Po or from attempting to interact with tourist visitors in Po, for fear of them

[19] Lasantha and Asanka claimed that Gamini's family had spread bad rumours about them, which had almost led to a physical confrontation. Neither of them explained to me what the rumours were about, except to say that Gamini's family were envious of the close friendships they had nurtured with various foreigners.

damaging his brothers-in-law's businesses. Places in this way also become politically charged sites that tie in kin relations, social relations and people's livelihood opportunities.

The tensions between groups and individuals in these two coastal communities is indicative of the process of deterritorialization that the tsunami aftermath helped accelerate, 'in which people, objects and ideas are rapidly shifting and refuse to stay in place' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 4). The process of deterritorialization, as outlined by Appadurai (1991) and Gupta and Ferguson (1997), is particularly relevant in this context as the tsunami's aftermath challenged the boundedness of village space, particularly in Po. All of a sudden NGOs, state officials and local and foreign entrepreneurs all congregated in this space, transformed it and occupied large sections of land. Villagers were relocated to IDP camps and tsunami housing schemes, others sold their land, and those that worked along the coast found that there were much fewer access points to the coast and as a result, to their source of livelihood. Furthermore, the construction taking place along the coast and the resultant privatisation of land erased the memory of key locations for many villagers. Some of the older men spoke to me nostalgically of spots along the coast where they had spent their youth and that were now blocked off by a boutique hotel or a sprawling foreign-owned villa. Conversely, many Thomale villagers viewed this development with resentment, they wanted to benefit from investment in their village, and they wanted their village to be acknowledged as worthy of that attention. With this in mind, in the following sections I take a closer look at villagers' relationships to place in both Po and Thomale, as well as the relationships formed around place, in a bid to better understand the root of tensions between these two villages.

People and place in Po

In Po, villagers unanimously identify the main beach area as the geographic and symbolic centre of the community. The beach is an area of socialisation for villagers, foreign tourists and other Sinhalese who come to spend the day swimming and drinking there. The beach is thus important to villagers' livelihoods and for outsiders, becomes emblematic of their image of Po. Groups from other parts of Sri Lanka and tourists from around the world, thus come into contact in this one place where conflicts sometimes break out, news is gathered, stories are shared and customs enacted. As Casey argues, places gather 'experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts' (Casey 1996: 24).

The central beach in Po is around two hundred metres in length and fifty metres in width. A narrow dirt road separates it from the rest of the village and across the road is one of the two main temples in the village.[20] The temple is flanked on either side by small shops and stalls selling all sorts of products – from food and drinks, to toys and swimming gear. On either side of the shops there is a patch of empty land on which fibre-glass fishing boats rest on their sides. At each end of the beach, the dirt road forks into a junction, with one path leading further along the coast in either direction, while the other path leads into the interior of the village.

Figure 13 Aerial view of Po, the area in the black box is the main beach and the red line is the dirt road separating it from the rest of the village. In the top right corner of the black box, the swimming pool belonging to the only hotel in Po can be made out.

At the eastern end of the main beach is a junction and a shabby guest house standing next to the only hotel in the village. In front of the guest house is a public shower complex built by a Korean NGO after the tsunami as part of the rehabilitation effort. The public shower complex was meant to provide bathing facilities for visitors to the beach. However, it turned out to be too expensive to maintain and remained shut for five years following the tsunami until a local entrepreneur recently took it over and privatised it, charging a fee to anyone who wanted to use it. At the western junction is a small fast-food restaurant shack and a shed that stores the snorkelling and diving equipment rented out to tourists. A recent addition to this side of the beach area is a small set of seats placed haphazardly under a tree. These seats serve as the local police post, at which three policemen may usually be seen monitoring village activity and carrying out surveillance for up to twenty-four hours a day. On the beach itself there are a number of carts selling snacks, beach balls

[20] The village temples play a minor role in the lives of my informants. I have been told by them that they do not think highly of the current monk in charge of the temple. As an example, Dhammika explained how youths had discovered women's underwear among his belongings while moving furniture. Most villagers attend the Matara main temple.

and cigarettes. Two men occasionally rent out inflatable tyres for use in the water. There is also a wide bare patch of land that is rented out as parking space for the buses and other vehicles that bring families down for the day from villages further inland.

Figure 14 A typical shop [*kade*] in Po selling basic household goods and food items.

Every morning many of the guest house owners with businesses around the beach area make their way to the beach at around six o'clock. Armed with spades, brooms and shovels, they proceed to clean the beach of leaves and litter left over by visitors on the previous day. This task usually takes no longer than half an hour. They pile the collected litter on the other side of the narrow path before setting it alight. They then retreat to a nearby ledge running along the side of the Korean-built showers and light up their cigarettes and share news and gossip, all the time monitoring the burning pile a few metres from them. They are quickly joined by other villagers making their way down to the beach, either to swim, search the sand and shallow waters for lost jewellery, or to fish. Before engaging in any of these activities, other village men stop and join the group to exchange news. This morning meeting is a significant aspect of village life and politics. The men get together and gossip about the groups of people who have visited the beach in the past week, as well as about

other villagers. They form their judgements about people from different localities based on stories presented at these daily meetings. Below is a typical conversation (translated with Lasantha's aid):

A: Did you see those people from Deniyaya yesterday?

B: Yes, they made a mess of the place – that's what happens when you get upcountry people, they don't know how to behave.

C: What did they do?

A: They left lunch packets everywhere, then some of the men drank too much and pissed on Lasantha's wall – and there were trees on the other side, they could have gone there.

C: Upcountry people are always like that, but they have nice women.

B: Maybe next time you show them your fishing pole, they will like that – their men only know how to put the rice in. (They all burst into laughter at this)

Most conversations about outsiders deal with similar themes to the one above. Besides talking about national politics and national news, a regular topic of conversation involved what they saw as the inferior qualities of Sri Lankans from other parts of the country. The men made it clear that they thought other Sri Lankans demonstrated a lack of respect towards their community. Usually the morning gatherings ended in jokes about outsider men's lack of virility, by contrast with men from Po. Po men used innuendos that highlighted their own sexual prowess. The men I knew and socialised with also got drunk and urinated in public, or littered the area. Their complaints about outsiders' habits had little to do with these activities and were more about men from Po having the right to do so in their village. Sunil, Lasantha's elder brother, told me:

> Before, it was different. If someone acts like that – drunk or dirty – we would beat them, now there are the police and we cannot do that. But that is also good, but sometimes they run away before we can get the police, and then it is difficult to do anything.

The men expressed feeling disempowered because of their inability to take matters into their own hands, even though many of the guest house owners said they were glad that the police were around. Nonetheless, villagers felt that it was a step towards loss of authority and legitimacy over their space; the fear that it would become just another site, an extension of the main town's administrative area, and controlled by it for that matter. Since the tsunami there had been growing interest by outsiders in the development of land and property in Po, given its tourism potential.

Many of the men and women I talked to regarded Matara as the seat of local government in the South. Politicians and lawyers had their offices there and most administrative and district offices were also located in the town, whereas villages, such as Po, were separated from the town and villagers felt that they had a large and considerable say in what went on locally. Now, my informants told me, things were changing. For two villagers, Dhammika and Chaminda, the increased police presence in the village was assimilated to a slow invasion by power and authority situated in the town.

The police presence represents a symbolic control (for example, the visibility of police uniforms discourages fighting in their presence) as well as a real control (they can and do use brute force or effect arrests). What has evolved since the introduction of the police post on the beach is a collective move by families and family businesses in the area to internalise the police into their community. Each household takes it in turn to prepare and take lunch packets to the police on duty and whenever there is a social function, or especially when the men meet up to drink in the evenings, the police are also invited. The police meet the family members and friends, share food and drink and socialise and empathise with villagers. This socialisation serves a double purpose; on the one hand it guarantees the protection of villagers' interests when confronted by outsiders (the police may not be from the village, but they are from other towns or villages in the vicinity, so there is already a common platform). On the other hand, families who host the police regularly, ensure their support against rival families in their village or neighbouring villages.

Conflicts do also sometimes break out between police and the villagers who affiliate with them. Lasantha was in the habit of keeping his boat on the beach, but in March 2012 he and other villagers were told by the police that they could no longer keep their boats there – this was a public area and the police had been told by their superiors to ensure that no one obstructed the beach area. Lasantha and the other villagers were furious. At the time he was approached by the police, I was at Lasantha's home having a tea and chatting with his wife, when he stormed through the gate clenching and shaking his fists. When I asked him what was wrong he spat angrily and said,

> The police told me to take my boat off the beach, I will not do it. How can the fishermen go to sea if they cannot keep their boats there? I tell you from now I give them no food, no drink, no help!! Our village [*Apē gama*]

From that day, Lasantha and the other villagers stopped giving lunch packets and drink to the police, and when members of the police approached them for information, locals reported that they hadn't seen or heard anything. No one removed their boats. After just over a week the police relented.

They met with Lasantha and two fishermen from the village and explained that it was not them but their superiors who had told them to carry out the orders. They stressed that they understood the local situation and would turn a blind eye from then on. The village embargo on the police was lifted. Lasantha and the other villagers were aware that the police were only acting on their superiors' orders however, as indicated earlier police are generally associated with the state and are considered to be state agents. Their refusal to co-operate with the police in this incident may be seen as a rejection of state intrusion into their space, as well as an act in which they confirmed their control over their space. In a way, village business owners were making it clear that the police were there to serve their interests and a refusal to do so robbed them of the perks they received from villagers.

However, the role of the police also had positive consequences. A guesthouse owner, Thushara, told me, 'with the police there are less complaints from foreigners, before many of the drunk men on the beach would bother them, now that does not happen – it is good for business.' However, they are torn between the notion of the beach as a place of business, and the beach as an important place of socialisation for villagers. Instead, the village men compensate for the intrusion by outsiders by commenting on the unmanly behaviour and inferior characteristics of the outsiders. It would seem that their perceived loss of control over their social space is balanced by their rhetorical dominance of the 'other' in the form of external intrusions. Thus, some village men talk of upcountry men as the 'bastardised offspring of southerners', where I have been told jokingly by youths, that the women who visit the beach from other localities are actually hoping to be satisfied sexually by the men of Po. On some occasions, Po youths will try to lure outside women away from their group, especially when the men they are with are drunk. It is also the case that a group of unmarried youths from Po will collectively bring a prostitute from further inland, expressing great joy at the fact that she is from another locality.

Conversations that take place at the beach also focus on recent events in the village: murders, suicides, scandals, weddings and funerals. These are internal affairs and caution is taken when talking about such incidents in order to avoid upsetting people present who might be directly involved. For example, sensitivity would be exercised if a family member had been murdered, unless the intention was to provoke and shame that person. The morning flow of conversation and exchange around the beach continues until the crowds of outside visitors arrive. Busloads of people turn up at the beach later in the morning, by around ten o'clock at the earliest. Before that time the beach area is a place of quiet socialisation for villagers. Fishermen and divers collect aquarium fish

from the coral in the morning or early evening, before moving further up the coast, while shop and stall owners prepare their stock and offer tea and snacks to locals and the police on duty.

Figure 15 Path separating the beach from the rest of the village, local stalls selling swimming gear in the background, and a bus carrying families from inland in the foreground. The last tree trunk on the left, at the end of the path is the makeshift police post, and a policeman can be made out sitting in its shade.

Activities around the beach follow a daily routine, with family members and friends affiliated with the various tourist businesses being constantly present throughout the day and occupying varying sections of the beach area. Most villagers' livelihoods revolve around the beach, especially guest houses – making it a contested space, as well as a symbol of local identity. The village may be seen as an aggregation of hierarchies (Scarduelli 1991), which in the context of Po reflects the competing businesses of various sizes and reputation, the police and the various groups of outsiders.

Place: Thomale as imaginary

Thomale is predominantly a fishing village located on the banks of the crocodile infested *Nilwala Ganga*.[21] A comparison between Po and Thomale here illustrates the conflicting experiences of post-tsunami rehabilitation on both communities' ideas of place and identity and more specifically, why Po was deemed more attractive to NGOs and foreign investors and beneficiaries. While Po has a beautiful, coral-lined beach and a generally benign environment, Thomale is situated on the banks of a murky and dangerous river. A section of the village borders the mouth where the river meets the sea and perilous undercurrents are common. Both communities suffered similar damage as a result of the tsunami, but whereas Po benefited from a stream of donations, projects and volunteers that boosted their local economy in terms of tourism, construction and development, Thomale received very little in terms of aid and its inhabitants had to rely on one another for help in overcoming the effects of the disaster. While the influx of development, outsiders and tourism in Po has had a marked influence on the ways space, place and livelihoods have been re-organised, Thomale has as a result, become more closed off to the surrounding communities, with locals displaying animosity towards outsiders, especially foreigners whom they regard partially as the cause of their misfortunes. Representatives of NGOs are particularly reviled. As Ramesh, a local fisherman in Thomale pointed out, 'Nobody help us – here only poor families, so why we help them?'

[21] Over 150 households are officially engaged in commercial fishing (see Table 5. in Chapter 3), whilst many individuals engage in part-time fishing as crew members during high season, especially between November and January.

Figure 16 Aerial view of Thomale with the river running along the bottom and the sea to the left. The boxed area is the centre of the village and its fish market, where boats can be seen moored at the river bank.

The village of Thomale is composed of a series of houses interspersed between trees and jungle foliage. These residences are connected by narrow pathways cutting through the foliage. There is only one road, which leads from the main Galle road to the village centre. The centre is marked by a short series of fish stalls on the bank of the river and an open concrete canopy to shelter fishermen whilst they mend their nets. Opposite this area is a large abandoned colonial era building, with rotting window frames and an overgrown front garden, and a small shop selling drinks, king coconuts (*thämbili*), cigarettes and *bulath* (betel, lime and tobacco – a concoction which is chewed as a mild stimulant). Transactions at the shop are made through a metal grill to protect the proprietor from drunk and unruly individuals, who make up a fair share of his clientele. Fishermen can be seen collected around this area during most of the day and evening, dressed in sarongs and often sporting machetes. The stalls are stacked with the day's catch for two hours from noon until 2pm and in the evening between 6pm and 8pm. People come from neighbouring villages and from the main town to buy fresh fish. They arrive in three-wheelers, on motorbikes or in cars, make their purchase and head off. I have been told by foreigners that it is an intimidating sight to enter the village centre and be met by rough looking muscular men with bloodshot eyes from too much sea spray and *arrack*. Foreign expats and locals I have talked to from surrounding villages have expressed uneasiness about venturing into Thomale. For some people from the surrounding villages, previous experiences of conflicts with Thomale villagers have been used as justification for their uneasiness. For foreign expats it is the very sight of the village centre and the men that occupy it that has most affected their perception, coupled with the often circulated narratives of the fishing community's reputation for violence. It is, however, the site for the best deals and freshest fish in the area. Some expats who purchase their fish from Thomale regard the experience as one of daring

and intrigue, a colourful anecdote for dinner parties with other expats. Peter, a wealthy English man living in a villa on the coast, described Thomale as,

> a truly dangerous place. Rather than the fish being on display, it felt as if I was on display – they scrutinised me like meat at a butchers and I was nervous the whole time. Thank heavens my driver was with me.

Peter had lived in his villa in coastal Sri Lanka since 2000 and employed a staff of six local Sinhalese to maintain his home, cook for him and his guests, and drive him around. His staff also served as his source of local information. All of his staff hailed from the same village near Kamburugamuwa. They all had a low opinion of fishermen and especially of Thomale villagers; for one of them who had family in Madagama, his reasons for disliking Thomale villagers were more personal. His family had had a long dispute with one fishing family over the purchase of a piece of land. For Peter and his expat guests, the subject of violence in coastal fishing villages was one of ongoing interest and intrigue and his staff satisfied his curiosity with exaggerated tales of murder and the savagery of the Thomale fishermen. This element of outsiders' intrigue in the unknown has also been noted by Mattei Candea in the context of Corsica with continental expats attempting to decipher mysterious graffiti around the village of Crucetta. Candea says of the expats' fascination that it became, 'a tangled skein of mystery, danger, and titillation, something to be uncovered and revealed' (Candea 2010: 43). Imaginaries of fishermen in this context represent what Candea refers to as the 'multiple economies of knowledge that coexisted' (Candea 2010: 43) both inside and outside of Thomale. Thus, for surrounding villages, Thomale was a place of violence and danger. For expats it was one of intrigue and mystery that conformed to their expectations of the native other. For state officials and NGOs it was an unattractive and uncontrollable site. All of these imaginaries had been further propagated by the events following the tsunami and the disputes that arose over the unequal distribution of aid.

Figure 17 *Malu mudalali* cutting fish at a fish stall in the centre of Thomale. The river is visible in the background.

My experience with villagers from Thomale indicates that men are aware of the reputation they have, enjoy it to some extent and are intent on keeping it that way. Suranji, a local of Thomale who is not a fisherman but a loan shark, tells me: 'That is the way here, if one family does not like this situation then they move village – I have had to do many things when I was younger, we had many fights with other villages – if they call, you have to go and fight, that is the way'. Many of the fishermen around the centre of the village would often stride around topless displaying scars from stab wounds and fights. Of the many men I befriended during the course of fieldwork, almost all had their battle scars to show from various brawls. Podi, a part-time fisherman from Thomale, explained their relationship with the police. He said simply, '*Polisiya bayayi*', that is, the 'police are scared', implying they won't even come to the village. In Po the police are seen to be representative of the state and its intrusion into their space and everyday lives, a necessary accompaniment to a growing tourism micro-economy. In Thomale the police are largely absent and locals are adamant when it comes to maintaining control of their village and their reputation for lawlessness. Their reputation for lawlessness in part guarantees that they will be left alone. It is interesting to note the different ways in which tensions and attitudes between the state and local communities are handled in different places post-tsunami. In Thomale, an absence of state and foreign driven aid is translated

into an ongoing narrative of control over their own lives and resources. Conversely, in Po the flood of aid and foreign projects invited tighter monitoring and attempted control by state actors. As illustrated in Chapter 4 using the case study of Asanka's campaign for mayor on the SLFP ticket, some villagers in Po also adopted state mechanisms of power and control.

Enacting place and identity

On the 11th of April 2012 I had lunch at the home of an English friend, a couple of villages down the coast from Thomale. After lunch, whilst sitting in his office I felt the chair I was sitting in tremble. Thinking nothing of it I continued my conversation before saying my goodbyes and headed off home on my bicycle. As I cycled through the narrow pathways along the coast leading to Po, I was surprised at how quiet everything was, not a person was in sight. As I approached the outskirts of the village, two youths sped by on a motorbike shouting, 'tsunami, tsunami!' Thinking it was a joke I continued cycling until another group of people who were collected outside a house shouted out the same thing. I began to accelerate towards Lasantha's home and as I passed the beach I heard the tsunami warning siren echoing through a loudspeaker attached to an electricity post. On arriving at Lasantha's home I found Saran in a panic, packing documents and clothes into a worn suitcase. She jumped when she saw me. She told me, 'Big earthquake in Indonesia – tsunami coming! Lasantha's in Colombo with the van. Maurice, I am going to father's house, but Mattias is not answering his phone – please go and warn him.' I agreed and sped off back down the coast. Mattias is an elderly Swedish man who owns a small bungalow (constructed after the tsunami) by the beach, and who had been coming back and forth to Po for eighteen years. He was one of the first foreign visitors to the area and is a long- time friend of the family.

I arrived at Mattias' home and informed him of the situation, at which he jumped up off the bed and began putting together a small suitcase. He had witnessed the destruction caused by one tsunami and was not too keen on being caught in the path of another. I returned to Lasantha's home to find it empty and made my way to his father's house, slightly further inland. Saran was there to meet me with the children and urged me to come in. I told her I would quickly go home to collect some items and return shortly. I remembered that my field-notes and passport were back at home. As I cycled the three kilometres back to Thomale, people were scuttling out of their homes in groups, clutching their belongings under their arms; some were crying. They were heading towards the Galle road. As I approached the junction I was met with scenes of panic, the road was jammed with buses, vans and motorcycles and people clambering into them and over them, shoving desperately and crying

out. Amidst the panic, youths and men were shielding the women, elderly and children to allow them to board the buses; the men refused to climb in. It was gut-wrenching to see the fear and despair in their faces as memories of the destruction wrought by the last tsunami must have been re-awakened.

As I turned into the road leading into the interior of Thomale, I was struck by the contrast – my neighbours and other villagers were sitting calmly outside the entrances to their homes, there was no movement and none of the commotion I had seen outside of the village. As I approached my house, they chanted at me 'Tsunami, tsunami!' I collected the bare essentials and hopped on my bicycle to head back to Po, and on seeing this, my neighbour shouted out, '*Kohede yanne?*' (Where are you going?), to which I answered, 'I am going to my friend's house', at which he and the others around him started laughing and mimicking my words. My neighbour's son then chimed in, '*Yaluwa gedareyi? Suduyi bayayi? Kamak na, api ge athule innam*' (your friend's house? Is the white man scared? No problem, we will be in the house).[22] I ignored the accusations and asked why they were not going inland, to which the son answered in a mocking tone, '*asanēpa heyin matta yanne bä'* (I can't go because I'm sick) and burst out laughing again. It was strange to see their calmness and composure, as well as experience their mocking. This was in contrast to the surrounding panic. Their apparent calmness seemed to me to be a deliberate act of defiance and a show of fearlessness that reflected their reputation. It was not only that they had not opted to leave the village or their homes, but rather that they chose to sit out in their street in plain view of all. It later dawned on me that I may have committed a grave error in leaving the village in favour of my friends in Po. I was indirectly telling my neighbours in Thomale that given the choice I would rather be in Po than there. I was repeating NGOs' actions post-tsunami and abandoning Thomale in favour of Po.

I cycled back through the panicked mob of people at the junction outside Thomale and felt a pang of guilt at having left the village the way I did. I returned to Lasantha's father's house to leave my belongings, intent on heading down to the beach to see whether there was any activity. I was, I must admit, emboldened by the jeering I had been subjected to. I thought at the time that my neighbours' jeering was a jab at the foreigner leaving at the first sign of danger. I later realised it was more probably an act of defiance in the face of another tsunami, or a show of contempt at my choice of Po over Thomale.

[22] Although these Sinhalese phrases may be considered grammatically wrong, they reflect the local dialect. Especially among the fishermen, abbreviations were common, and the addition of the suffix –uyi or -ayi was especially common. For example, Kohomada would become Komē or komayi, loku or would become lokuyi etc.

As I was leaving to go to the beach Asanka stopped me at the gate. His father's house was a tall three-storey building, towering above all others in the village, an imposing indication of the family's status in the community. The only other building that compared in height was Asanka's guest house. He had made sure that when constructing it he would make it a metre lower than that of his father. At the entrance to the property and set in the garden was a separate bungalow which they had recently been refurbishing and was due for completion the next day, in time for the New Year's celebrations on the 13th to 14th April. Asanka led me into the bungalow. He let out a long sigh whilst resting his arm on the nearly finished window sill and commented on the irony; in one day the repairs would have been complete, and now there was the possibility that it would all be destroyed again. He patted the wall then turned to me and explained that the last time there was a tsunami, the bungalow was almost completely inundated with water; the open door released some of the pressure on the walls and prevented the whole structure from being destroyed. He proceeded to show me the tiles and the old doors brought over from their great grandfather's old house in Matara town. I asked him about the tsunami but he ignored me and carried on with his tour of the bungalow, giving me details about the house and the origins of the various materials and fittings lying about. He explained where the door and window frames came from and their different designs and the woods used. He pointed out which were salvaged old parts and which were newly made. It seemed like he wanted to avoid talking about the possible oncoming tsunami and instead dwell on the details of the almost newly finished bungalow, enjoying its novelty and its near-completeness, both of which may have soon been washed away before they had time to finally enjoy them.

I stepped outside the gate for a cigarette and Asanka followed me, motioning to me to pass him one. Whilst having the cigarette he kept a watchful eye on the entrance so that his father would not see him smoking. It occurred to me that even on the brink of an impending disaster, he was still concerned about not being caught smoking, still conscious of dominant social conventions. I asked him whether they would be heading inland and he said,

> You know Maurice, the last tsunami all of us ran away. I felt very bad for that. This time I will not leave my home, I will stay. If I leave what will the other people think of us?

We fell into silence, finished our cigarettes and re-entered the house. The rest of the family and Mattias were crouched on the floor in front of the television watching the news – the threat had passed, no tsunami would hit the Sri Lankan coastline. Everyone let forth a sigh of relief, tea was brought out and we started talking about preparations for the New Year's festivities. The mood was lighter, although there was now an air of melancholy. Hamzi's (Asanka's father) eyes welled up as he

started recounting scenes from the last tsunami. What he focused on most was the immediate aftermath:

> For many weeks after bad smell everywhere, always finding bodies – we were very afraid to go out, maybe we find one of our neighbours. I come down after four days, I could not recognise anywhere, stones, trees, clothes and bad, bad smell. I never forget the smell. Sometimes I pass with the bicycle by the second junction – I get bad feeling. After the tsunami I was walking that area and I see arm hanging out, then the head. I never pass there again, too many bad memories.

Figure 18 Locals in the tsunami aftermath covering their mouths and noses from the stench of dead bodies, the smell remained for weeks after as bodies continued to be uncovered in the rubble and foliage.[23]

As I cycled back home, some people had filtered back to the roads and paths running through the villages and were collected in groups outside homes, sitting in plastic chairs. I stopped to talk to a group of youths I knew from Po, the families around them were recollecting the events of the tsunami of 2004, remembering those they had lost and the events that transpired on that fateful day. It was a sombre and sobering scene.

[23] Photo courtesy of Clare Allen Crook.

Vulnerability is determined by a number of factors: the economic and social status of individuals and groups, symbolic and cultural capital, political structures, livelihoods and identities linked to place (Sanderson 2000). All of these affect the responses to situations of risk and determine how people will act when faced with threat. In the case of Asanka and his family, their shame at having run away during the last tsunami discouraged them from leaving this time. Asanka was concerned about what other people might think of them if they left. In a conversation with Asanka after the event he had explained that his position in the village as an influential man who had also campaigned for a prominent political post would have been severely affected by his leaving the village in the face of danger. My own additional interpretation of the family's desire not to leave is based on the often recounted stories of the aftermath, where I had been told that they were prevented from returning to the village for days after and had had their homes looted during that period of absence. The family seemed intent, as did other families and individuals, on not allowing the wave and outsiders to lay claim to their land and possessions, or to allow them to reshape their community again.

In the case of Thomale, the refusal to leave the village and their mocking attitude, as well as the apparent light-heartedness in the face of danger, reflects the stereotypes people have of them, as well as the image of fearlessness they seem intent on living up to. Thomale villagers already live precarious lives on the edge of a dangerous river, where most people are engaged in the risky business of deep-sea fishing and violence is a feature of everyday life. The narratives generated about Thomale are reflective of what Keith Basso refers to as 'place-based thoughts about the self' (Basso 1996: 107), by which he is referring to the ways in which places inspire people to think about themselves, about other places and the people that inhabit them, as well as about their own histories and where they came from. For many outsiders who venture into Thomale the sight of machetes, drunkenness and fish entrails around its centre, as well as the shoddy appearance of houses and streets, all give credence to the image of Thomale as a dangerous and lawless place. Villagers themselves contrast this image with that of Po's coral-lined beaches and luxurious foreign-owned properties to highlight Po as an affluent village whose villagers are mostly better off than them. Stories commonly told to children in Thomale are cautionary tales related to the dangers of living at the edge of the river, and the perils of the human-sea relationship. Thus, in the case of both Po and Thomale, the possibility of another threat motivates villagers to enact dominant perceptions of themselves, as well as dominant perceptions others have of them.

Placing others and the self

Villagers in Po and Thomale draw a distinction between two main categories of outsiders - Sri Lankans from other parts of the island and foreigners. Villagers categorise other Sri Lankans into three groups: Southerners, up-country people and city people. Southerners may vary from group to group, however they are generally preferred over up-country and city Sri Lankans. Southerners are said to have similar attitudes to the villagers of Po and Thomale, an understanding of coastal life, a similar sense of humour and every now and then connections are discovered between friends and family. Up-country people on the other hand are looked down on; they are seen to be dependent on caste affiliations and are considered crude, backward and uneducated. If someone is employed in a government job (police, education officer, clerk etc.), being sent to the up-country or to rural areas, particularly in the North, is seen as a punishment. City people are viewed as arrogant and condescending. Sunil says of them, 'they always complain, they are never happy, and if they get to know you they make promises and never keep them, they have *dos*'.[24] City people are affiliated with either Colombo or Kandy. The other category of outsiders includes foreigners and tourists visiting the area, who are generally viewed favourably (in Po) – they are recognised as an essential driving force to the local economy, they inhabit the guest houses, use the surrounding facilities, and bring money into the community. They have become essential cogs in the machinery of village life. Conversely, villagers have expressed concern at the increased privatisation of village land, including villagers engaged in the tourism industry. Thushara, a guest house owner from Po states, 'We like it when the foreigners come to visit. We don't like when they buy all this land and tell us what we must do in our village.'

For many Sinhalese – the nation [*jatiya*][25] is portrayed as a collective Sinhalese-Buddhist space that pervades history, language, ethnicity, and culture, in its formulations of what the nation is, as well as a rejection of characteristics that affiliate it to Tamil conceptions of the nation. The parallel here is that in post-tsunami Sri Lanka there are tensions that arise over legitimate connections to place and over the control of the development of place. What I have described in this chapter are the tensions that emerge as a result. Spencer (1990b) in his introduction to *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, writes about the colonisation of areas in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka, by Sinhalese, thus placing them 'in the hinterland of the main centres of Tamil population' (1990b: 10). He goes on to write:

[24] *Dos* refers to character flaws and in this situation is being used in the context of someone who cannot be trusted – who goes back on his/ her word. It may also be used in the context of a defect, blemish or disease (cf. Simpson 1984).

[25] Tennekoon (1990) notes that the term *jatiya* also refers to ethnic group.

> Here is one source of the characteristically Tamil concern with space—the delineation of the 'homelands'—rather than time; identity is a matter of belonging to a place as much as having a history, and that is what has been threatened by Sinhala efforts to rebuild in what they take to be the image of the island's past (Spencer 1990b: 10).

In Po, the threat of outsiders colonising parts of their community, and rebuilding it in ways that they deem a coastal tropical village should look like, is in itself a reflection of wider national concerns with space and political legitimacy. Writing about the different relationships to land between locals and visitors in Corsica, Candea notes:

> Relations to the land are often cast in terms of a distinction between locals who have an essential attachment to and deep knowledge of the land and visitors who merely come to look at the landscape, whose understanding is superficial and stereotyped, who may or may not be allowed to "step behind the postcard" (Candea 2010: 72)

The latter echoes what Bourdieu defines by habitus, where it 'implies a "sense of one's place" but also a "sense of the place of others"'(Bourdieu 1989: 19). Villagers in Po clearly welcome the investment that comes with tourists and foreign expats, as well as the new commodities and ideas that filter through as a result of the demands of an increasingly diverse village population. For example, expats living in Po and Madagama have introduced youths to novelties such as: hi-tech mobile phones, Facebook, the luxuries of domestic ice machines, patio furniture and even techno music. Guest house owners have expressed to me their desire to visit the European countries their guests hail from. Some have attempted to replicate the dress styles and architectural designs they have been shown in expat photos of their home towns. For example, Asanka who has been involved in the construction of houses for foreigners since 2006 has learnt of Western architectural designs and adapted them to his own home and the homes of friends. When I rented Suranji's house in Thomale the rooms were barren and the floors were made of the red polished concrete typical of many Sri Lankan homes. The roof and parts of the wall were in a state of neglect and had holes poking through. When I first entered the house, Suranji had led me directly to the bathroom which was graced with all the modern fittings and amenities and looked like a typical Western bathroom. He told me, 'Asanka make for me' and grinned. However, villagers have also expressed concern at the dominating presence of foreigners and their homes and the resultant erosion of family values and responsibilities in favour of more individualist ones. Furthermore, villagers rarely reveal the full view of village life to their foreign expats, such as exorcisms [*thovils*], visits to the soothsayer [*sāsthra kāraya*], or other ritual events. In fact, Lasantha has expressed embarrassment at revealing

these aspects to foreigners, stating that he thinks they disapprove of such rituals, they would not understand them and they might think less of them for it.

While some villagers are in awe of foreigners and their lifestyles and express embarrassment at their own, they present a counter-narrative when talking about other Sri Lankans. When talking about other Sri Lankans many villagers have expressed contempt and a feeling of superiority, with Indika, a diver from Po stating that, 'The south is the real Sri Lanka, we don't change.' Throughout my fieldwork I have travelled to various parts of Sri Lanka with Lasantha. During these trips when other Sri Lankans asked him where he was from, he always stated '*Mam Matara inne*' (I am from the Matara area), making it clear he was from the South. Lasantha has explained to me that explicitly mentioning Matara conveys to other Sri Lankans a set of characteristics associated with this area. He detailed them as follows: it is a fighting area, the people have a particular dialect, people are involved in the practice of demonology and they have a history of colonial resistance. Lasantha further emphasised that these characteristics adhere to southern conceptions of 'being Sinhalese'. He explains, 'If I have trouble and I say I am from Matara area, then they know – everyone very scared of Matara people – everybody knows us.' His younger brother Asanka uses similar examples, 'you know what they say of us? Matara people eat too much tuna; tuna makes the blood thicker, thick blood boils quicker.' This is an example he has utilised on many occasions to stress what he takes to be one of the defining characteristics of the people of the area. Moreover, he makes this claim with pride. In this way villagers carve out a spatial identity in which they themselves reflect their own notions of the ideal nation and their place in it and simultaneously reject the place of others. The latter parallels Lefebvre's contention that, 'space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power' (Lefebvre 1991: 26).

In this chapter I have outlined villagers' of Thomale and Po's relationships to place and how tensions arise from the transformation of place in the aftermath of a critical event. In the next chapter I take this discussion a step further and illustrate the different relations that villagers have with outsiders, particularly foreigners, and how they employ narratives to both empower themselves and disempower the other.

Chapter 6 – Exoticization and narratives of power

Towards the end of my first year of doctoral fieldwork in 2012, I had just moved into Sunil's house in the village of Po. Sunil ran a guest house which in part also served as his home where he lived with his wife and daughter. One day at the end of October 2012, I decided to treat myself and had brought home a bottle of wine I had purchased from an off-license store in the main town. Sunil picked up the bottle and surveyed it closely, brought it up to his nose and said 'This is wine no? For women only?', to which I confirmed that it was indeed wine, but both men and women drank it. He gave me an unconvinced look and added, 'but we drink this not to get drunk no? This one only for the taste!' Sunil's brother Lasantha had given me a lift to town on his motorbike and walked up behind me after placing his helmet on the ground. He chimed in stating that it must be for women because it was very light in alcoholic content, had no acrid taste and was very expensive (a bottle cost 1,500 rupees or around 9Euros at the time of writing). This comment pointed to what the men often said about women with regards to drink, an association of women with being weak (like wine) and flamboyant with money. I told Lasantha that Peter *mahathmayā*, a wealthy and powerful British man who lived in a beach side villa in the next village also drank wine. Both looked up in interest upon hearing this and asked if they too could try some wine. If Peter *mahathmayā* drank wine then it must be a prestigious drink and one worthy of a man, and a man of status at that.

Peter, a British expatriate, had coordinated numerous relief projects from 2005 to 2007 in southern Sri Lanka in aid of those affected by the 2004 Asian tsunami. He has lived in his beach side villa in the south since the early 2000s and had been relatively unknown locally until the disaster struck. His generosity and deep involvement in the rehabilitation efforts in the immediate aftermath had made him a household name along the southern coastal strip, yet something of an enigma. He kept very much to himself and locals in neighbouring villages mythologised his wealth and power (cf. Salazar 2012). As Gilberto Velho (2001) has indicated, people and things which are in proximity to us are not necessarily familiar and may turn out to be more exotic than those which are at a greater distance to us.

In this chapter I analyse the relationships and interactions between expatriates, travellers and local Sinhalese in southern Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the Asian tsunami of 2004. The disaster received unparalleled media attention and millions of dollars in aid poured into the country. In the process, aid distribution altered the Sri Lankan landscape and reversed the power relations between locals and foreigners, where outsiders became gift givers and locals were beneficiaries of aid and relief (Gamburd 2014; Stirrat and Henkel 1997). Through the distribution of aid and the experience of the

disaster, coastal Sri Lankans were depicted as vulnerable, poor and unable to cope without help from the outside world, whereas foreigners were depicted as wealthy and powerful. I specifically explore the persistence of these latter perceptions and the misplaced expectations of the 'other' that emerge as a result of the experience of the tsunami aftermath. How is the ongoing project of identity making renegotiated in light of diverging expectations of the other?

Often the experience of the other is preceded by a preconception and expectation of that experience (cf. Bruner 2005). Tourists travelling to exotic locations may expect to replicate pre-established imaginaries they have of the place and people they are visiting, or of themselves in that place. The case studies I present here illustrate two aspects of this type of exoticization and counter-exoticization. Following on the work of Edward Bruner I highlight the ways in which 'narratives are structures of power' (Bruner 1986:144), that emerge from dominant political processes, in this case post-tsunami recovery. In this respect, the case studies I present here highlight the ways in which post-tsunami narratives of the powerful foreigner and the vulnerable, uncivilized local *versus* the cunning local and gullible foreigner are utilised as both empowering and disempowering lacunae in the imaginary of the self. Thus, exoticization and counter-exoticization is seen here as a reciprocal process (Theodossopoulos 2014), as well as counter reactions used both to empower and to disempower.

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2014) notes that exoticization in the context of tourism can be a reciprocal process and states that 'the host communities gradually develop their own versions of exoticization, as they categorize and stereotype the tourists' (Theodossopoulos 2014: 57). His argument here is that recognising this counter-exoticization by the hosts allows us to see them as more than just passive agents, who instead utilise the encounter with the foreign other to renegotiate their own identities. In the context of post-tsunami coastal Sri Lanka the disaster aftermath provided a platform for the enactment of different levels of exoticization and counter-exoticization. Theodossopoulos in his work on the Emberá of Panama identifies two tropes in the process of exoticization. The first is the view of the native as backward, uncivilized and primitive. The second trope is that of the noble savage living in harmony with nature and their surroundings. In the context of post-tsunami Sri Lanka, the general tendency I observed among expatriates and travellers was to adopt two adaptations of the first trope – 1) a view of villagers as vulnerable victims deserving empathy and friendship, and 2) a view of villagers as poor, uneducated and savage, with whom one must always be on the alert, and in many cases a combination of these two views. The widespread contact with outsiders and the development post-tsunami, had reduced the likely possibility of travellers or expatriates imagining an untouched paradise where villagers lived in

harmony with their surroundings, oblivious to the outside world. In contrast, I argue that villagers' interactions with expatriates reflect a counter narrative to the stereotypes foreigners develop of them. These stereotypes emerged in no small way as a reaction to the publicity and media coverage surrounding the tsunami aftermath that portrayed locals as vulnerable and lacking agency (Gamburd 2014).

The competitive nature of aid distribution in the disaster aftermath (cf. Stirrat 2006) motivated some villagers to develop elaborate narratives of personal loss and despair. In this way they appealed to charitable foreigners in the hope of receiving aid. It also led many Sri Lankans to assume that all foreign visitors were wealthy and easily manipulated. Youths in Po would sometimes joke and boast with each other about who had come up with the most elaborate narratives to separate tourists and other foreigners from their money. Many villagers in Po, particularly those attached to the tourist industry, disapprove of this deception and attribute the mounting distrust expressed by foreigners, to its widespread practice. Thushara, a guest house owner in Po claims that such actions are motivated by greed and a lack of shame and attributes this trend to the irresponsible distribution of aid post-tsunami. However, Thushara whose guesthouse was destroyed by the tsunami, regularly utilised photos of the damage he sustained to inspire sympathy in tourists and expatriates he conducted business with.

The context of the widespread distribution of aid has altered the nature of relationships between southern Sri Lankans and European visitors, such that the normally bounded tourist spaces of coastal Sri Lanka have been extended to incorporate previously untouched areas along the southern coast. Rather than engaging fully with the villages they inhabit, some expatriates who have moved into these localities develop their own version of an authentic tropical location as a way of consolidating their different perceptions of paradise. In response, villagers counter these perceptions through narratives of control.

In the following sections I illustrate some of the stereotypes that emerge out of the social distancing between villagers and outsiders, as case studies in exoticization and counter-exoticization. A useful departure point in understanding the attempt by foreigners to create the ideal paradise and their rejection of the native as a grotesque juxtaposition to the splendour of their environment is to consider the narrative of Ovid's *Pygmalion*. *Pygmalion* was a Cypriot sculptor who, disgusted by witnessing the *Propoetides* reduced to prostitution, is put off women. He carves a statue out of ivory and names her *Galatea*, but so realistic is the statue that he falls in love with her. Ashamed of his desire for *Galatea* he makes offerings to the goddess *Aphrodite* to grant him a woman in her likeness and on returning home and clasping his sculpture he feels the ivory turn soft and into flesh.

The story depicts *Pygmalion's* aversion to the immoral woman tainted by prostitution and leads him onto a search for the ideal, only the ideal comes from him, is controlled and shaped by him and consumes him. *Pygmalion* we are told goes on to marry *Galatea* and they have a son and lead a happy life, but rarely does the myth become reality.

Modalities of control

I was sitting in a cushioned wicker chair overlooking a garden teeming with colour in a house located at the edge of the fishing village of Thomale. At that moment Marta stormed past the back porch, foaming at the mouth and spitting out curses in French. She paused as she reached the edge of the porch, turned her head and glared at her husband. Switching to English, supposedly for my benefit, she told her husband 'those fools! I told them not to block the road and now they come to lay the gravel – it's a small mountain in the middle, there is no way to go round it.' Bertrand sighed as his wife made her way into the house and banged the door shut. He poured me another glass of beer and explained,

> we knew they wanted to add gravel and make a section of the road, but we asked them to wait a few days. I told you we need to go to the airport to pick up some friends tomorrow morning, now the road is blocked so we surely cannot get out.

He poured himself a beer and added,

> they do this on purpose you know, because we are the foreigners. You never see labourers on Sunday, and today they are working. It's a big coincidence. No? These people they are still so backward, they need some education. Why do they act like this with us?

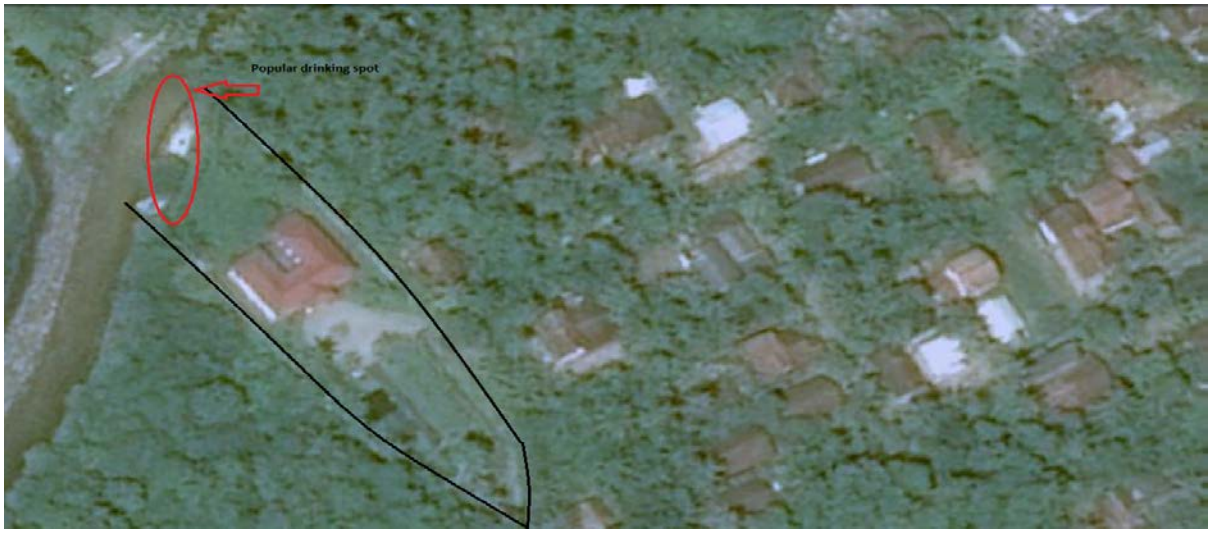

Figure 19 An aerial view of Bertrand and Marta's property in Thomale outlined in black. The red oval denotes the popular drinking spot that the property blocked off to locals.

We were sitting on the patio leading to Bertrand's extensive garden, which was protected by a wall lined with a variety of local trees and plants to keep curious villagers out. His house is located a kilometre and a half from the centre of Thomale, a small fishing village of less than 600 households. It was early October 2012 when I found myself sitting in Bertrand's garden. I was ten months into my doctoral fieldwork. Tensions had been high between Bertrand and the other villagers ever since he had built his house and moved in permanently a year earlier. His house had blocked off a popular drinking spot and he had refused to let locals pass through the stretch of land at the end of his garden (Fig.19). Bertrand and his wife had described the villagers to me as 'backward fishermen who will try to cheat you every chance they get.' I had been living in the same village for almost nine months by that time. I had not had similar experiences to Bertrand's. I had asked other villagers what they thought about Bertrand and his wife. Podi, a part time fisherman, was puzzled by them. Podi was standing with his foot against a wall whilst I spoke to him and two friends of his sat cross-legged below him leaning against the same wall. Podi explained that he found it odd that they had come to live in Thomale and not Po where all the other foreigners lived. His friends nodded in agreement. He continued,

> They came to live in our village and we thought they wanted to know us, maybe they liked our village. But then they built a big house with walls all around and many trees and they don't invite anyone. They come to our village but they keep the village out, then they always tell us "don't do this" and "don't go there". The wife says she doesn't like fishermen so why did they build a house in THIS village?

Bertrand had visited Sri Lanka in early 2008 with the intention of locating a piece of coastal land for development. He had visited the island twice since the tsunami and identified what he explained to be an opportunity to build his dream home, something he would never have been able to afford back in France. His garden is a sea of flowers and various fruit trees and bird baths had been placed at strategic intervals to attract exotic birds. As I walked through his garden for the first time that day in October 2012, he pointed around him and said,

> Look at this. Look how beautiful, all of these plants are from this island. In the mornings and evenings it is full of birds, it's unbelievable. You see their (the villagers') gardens and homes? They have all this beauty and they don't know how to use it.

As I sat sipping beer on Bertrand's back porch, Marta stormed back out with a new energy. I heard her shouting and cursing a few moments later and I got up to peer round the side of the house. She was at the gate wagging her finger at a thin Sri Lankan man and another stocky local standing behind him. I heard her shout,

> Ah you don't know? You think you can scare me with your police friend? I will call the embassy. We are not Sri Lankans; you will learn that with us you cannot pull these tricks. I will call the embassy now!

At the mention of embassy both men appeared panicked and began waving their hands about and apologising. Bertrand had joined the group and there was some muffled talk between them, followed by an audible 'Ok Madam, I'm sorry Madam, ok.' I walked up to the gate as the group disappeared down the path. A group of local men began frantically shovelling gravel from a mound on the path into the adjoining gardens. After catching sight of the operation I quickly scuttled back to the table overcome by an inexplicable feeling of awkwardness and embarrassment.

Bertrand's efforts at creating a little corner for himself, his own epitome of a tropical paradise, have all been to an extent centred on control. The land was cleared and developed and every detail in his property was meticulously designed and coordinated. The act of enclosing the property in high concrete walls is also an attempt at giving it a bounded and impenetrable quality. Hennig (2002) asserts that the tourist's conception of paradise is not only one composed of natural beauty but also includes particularities of otherness displayed by the native. Contrarily some expatriates in southern Sri Lanka are intent on recreating a controlled niche teeming with particularities of its own, but that shuts out the native. The tensions between Bertrand and his neighbours and other villagers seem to stem from his inability to control them or their actions. They stand in stark opposition to the world he is trying to create within his walls. He complains about the villagers as violent, uneducated and

uncivilized, whereas his home is a microcosm of the beauty reflected in the landscape that he deems the locals are unable to appreciate. The latter mirrors colonial accounts of Sri Lanka, where the splendour of the land is juxtaposed against the savagery of the native (Kravanja 2012).

Jagath, Bertrand's neighbour and a day labourer, explained the incident with Bertrand and his wife to me. Residents in the area had been complaining to the relevant authorities for a while that they needed to get the road paved. Finally approval was given, but due to lack of funds an agreement was reached by which the materials and machinery for paving the road would be donated, but residents would have to perform most of the initial labour. Since the roller would be turning up the next morning, residents decided to prepare the road the afternoon before (Sunday). Podi, translating for Jagath and another neighbour, said

> See this is also their road now, but they do not help. Our friend, who was helping us and is a policeman, went up to talk to Madam when she started shouting. He told her, "Madam, I am with the police…" then she started screaming, so we said ok we will clear the road.

Jagath explained that they had tried to be friendly with them but Bertrand and Marta were always angry and called them liars. Podi said,

> It's possible other people lie to them, but we did nothing to them. They think that they can do what they want here. When they left with the car we put the gravel back in the road and we left it there for three days. When they came back in the evening they were very angry, they couldn't find anyone to shout at, but we could see them. This is our village.

It was only weeks later that I found out from Podi that Jagath and the other residents had not really put the gravel back in the road, out of fear of possible repercussions, but had asked Podi to help them save face when relating the story to me.

Jagath and Bertrand's other neighbours were part of a strong social network, they were capable of mustering support from other villagers. They had friends in the police and the village had a reputation for violence and toughness. Yet, when it came to confronting the foreigners in their village they hesitated out of fear and fabricated a narrative of the event, perhaps a narrative of the way they had hoped to handle the situation. When I had asked Podi what repercussions they feared, he explained that foreigners had a lot of influence, they could appeal to powers that were inaccessible to them such as their embassies. Podi explained,

> after the tsunami there were many NGOs and foreigners in Matara district. They took many of the decisions and big people in the towns listened to them.

He also suggested that many foreigners didn't like the fishermen. Why else would they exclude Thomale from receiving aid and give to other places like Po? Some villagers, Podi explained, associated foreigners with NGOs and resented them as a result. Some may have even been unfriendly to Bertrand and Marta.

The narrative provided by Jagath and the other villagers could be seen as an attempt to convey that they were taking control of their space. It may be seen as an apt metaphor for the politics of place being enacted here. Bertrand and Marta altered the land to develop a microcosmic ideal of what a tropical paradise should look like, in response to which villagers altered the land to create an obstruction to that ideal. In their narrative the path was cleared to allow them to leave but blocked to prevent the foreign couple from reaching their ideal (enclosure). Seen this way their narrative reflects the couples' own perception that the only impediment to their vision of paradise is the local and his/her interactions with them. Furthermore, Jagath emphasises the fact that they can't be found or contacted but yet are there casting their gaze. What is seen is not necessarily known but may become familiar (Velho 2001) just as foreigners were regularly seen as part of the post-tsunami landscape but were far from contact, at least to villagers in Thomale. The animosity between the foreign couple and the villagers is also a reflection of locals' view of the political hierarchy in the aftermath of the tsunami. In adopting a submissive stance to Bertrand and Marta's challenge the villagers accept the foreign couple's superior status and their own vulnerability.

In the next section I present a case study from Po that illustrates the opposite situation to that in Thomale. Some locals in Po have managed to utilise foreigners and their investments for their own benefit by employing strategies adapted from post-tsunami interactions with foreigners in their areas and the heightened competitiveness between those involved in the distribution of aid.

Handling the other

While there are a number of foreign individuals, couples, and even families who live in the village of Po for most of the year, the majority have built holiday homes where they spend only a short period of time every year. When these properties are vacant, they are entrusted to Lasantha's care. As a guest house owner, Lasantha has managed to establish numerous close connections with foreigners over the years, including brokering the purchase of coastal land for them and registering it under his name. In return the foreign owners allow him to rent rooms out to tourists when his guest house is full, or when there is a large group of tourists looking to rent a private property. On many occasions

these properties are also used by Lasantha and his brothers and their friends to get away from their wives and have a drink.

Foreigners who have bought property and spend only short periods of time in the area every year are an important capital generating source to Lasantha and his family as a result of their property. Their house provides additional income and it is also a place where covert activities take place and socialisation of a different kind takes place. An example of the latter would be drinking with women. The very fact that the property is foreign owned guarantees a certain amount of privacy, allowing activities that would not normally be accepted in the village space to occur undisturbed and to a degree unquestioned within the property's walls. It is both a part of the village and at the same time closed off to it. Thus in this way, while some foreigners create homes representative of their ideal tropical setting, locals use these same properties to enact their ideals – of covertness and concealment from family and village.

In October 2012 Sunil invited me for a drink. He was visibly excited and informed me that in two weeks' time Gareth would be visiting for a month. Gareth, an English businessman, had known Sunil and his family since just before the tsunami and in 2010 with the aid of Sunil's younger brother Asanka, had bought a plot of coastal land to build a boutique hotel. Asanka hired the masons and labourers and his wife, a civil engineer, drafted the plans for the building. His father Hamzi supervised the works. Hamzi told me, 'You have to be careful, these masons are thieves, you must always watch. When you're not looking they steal materials for their own home.' Asanka agreed to reserve the whole hotel for Gareth when he visited and for the rest of the year he would rent it out to tourists and keep the profits himself.

The hotel was completed in early 2011 and was decorated with enlarged photos from Gareth's numerous travel destinations. It had a spacious lawn that spread down to the sea and a private beach, with a small stretch of garden at one end concealed by two walls and a gazebo. It is an ideal site for socialisation. Being an upmarket tourist establishment (at least for this area), it discourages other villagers and wives from coming in and the stretch of concealed garden at the end allows for almost complete privacy. Most nights men would collect at that end of the garden and drink. Asanka utilised the hotel as a socialisation point to further his links with local businessmen and politicians.

When Gareth returned in late October 2012, he had moved into his hotel – which had then ceased to cater to tourists, except when Sunil's brother Lasantha's place was full. Gareth ordered numerous cases of beer upon arrival and invited Sunil, his family members and local friends for drinks. At that

time Wilhelm, a retired Dutch man who had known Sunil and his family for 25years, was visiting for two weeks. He had visited twice a year, every year since first coming to the village. I had met him numerous times and each time had been introduced to him again and again as 'uncle Wil'. Sunil had told me, 'he is like my uncle, like my father's brother – he always stays at my house.' However, on this occasion I bumped into Wilhelm having a meal at Lasantha's home and was surprised to see him there. He told me he had gone straight to Sunil's but did not find anyone, so he stayed at their mother's house that also catered as a guest house. When Sunil passed by to visit his parents, Wilhelm welcomed him and embraced him and asked if he had a room available to which Sunil said 'no – the place is full.' It came as a shock when before I had any knowledge of this conversation, I blurted out that I was the only person staying at Sunil's.

Wilhelm looked flustered and said,

> It's that Gareth again, he is here so they don't have any time for anyone else – Sunil is always going where there is money. I love him like a brother but he thinks only about his wallet. Three days I have been trying to meet him and calling for a drink, but he says he is always busy. I know where he is, drinking with Gareth, but they never join us when he is here.

Since Gareth had arrived five days earlier, Sunil was rarely ever at home and spent every evening drinking with Gareth. Gareth had given him money to restore his guest house. As more time passed a clear rift began to develop between Gareth and the group of expatriates and regular visitors staying in the village. Locals praised him and foreigners denounced him as arrogant.

One week after his arrival, Gareth was invited to Sunil's for dinner and I was asked to join. Gareth was accompanied by four British friends who were visiting for a week. I introduced myself and sat down opposite them. A group of village friends had joined and he made a point of greeting each by name, asking after their families and introducing them loudly to his friends who sat in awe of his familiarity with villagers. Throughout the evening he dominated the discussion with accounts of his travels and exploits, inviting others at intervals to share their stories. Following dinner, he asked Sunil about the local situation and if there were any problems, adopting the pose of a godfather listening to his clients' requests. Sunil narrated a feud between his wife and Lasantha's wife. Sunil claimed that his wife had been attacked by his brother's sister-in-law. He and his brother Lasantha had been out drinking and on returning home, Lasantha's sister-in-law had attacked Sunil, whose wife jumped to his defence. After hearing their version of the story Gareth said, 'this is not right on her part, she should apologise, I am surprised they allowed this to happen, I will talk to them

tomorrow'. Gareth was quick to give an opinion and a solution – and it seemed that he saw himself very much as a mediator, a situation I found to be common among some expatriates settled in Po.

Lasantha told me that the whole family was very fond of Gareth, especially since he had returned just after the tsunami to aid in their recovery. However, Lasantha's wife Saran, expressed irritation at Gareth's interference in their domestic affairs, especially the situation concerning her sister. She was more irritated at Sunil whom she was sure had done this purposely. To have scolded her sister or fought with her family would have caused trouble for Sunil and his brother, but not for Gareth. Effectively Sunil had used Gareth as a pawn in his quest for vindication. While Lasantha did his best to devote equal attention to all his foreign friends, Sunil seemed to distribute time and attention based on what he was most likely to get in return. When I asked Sunil about the situation between him and Wilhelm, he said:

> I like him a lot and we have been friends for a long time, but Gareth is like family. I want to invite him to my house but it's not nice if I have guests, then it's like a business not a home.

When I asked Lasantha about the situation he said,

> this is not true. Wilhelm is always there for Sunil and it's not right for him to treat him like this. Now that he knows he won't stay with Sunil anymore. Sunil is my brother, but he always thinks of money. Gareth is here for business, he's a nice man, but he's here for business.

Lasantha stated that his family protects Gareth's investments in property while he is away and although a kin idiom is utilised to refer to the relationship, it is merely a mutually beneficial economic relationship that is also loosely based on friendship. Gareth invests in land and property that they then utilise to reap a profit, employ other villagers in construction and position themselves as providers of employment in the village, whilst Gareth's property is protected through their sponsorship (the property is registered in their family name).

Unlike Thomale, Po benefited from continual projects and NGO presence in the aftermath of the tsunami. Villagers were acquainted with foreigners and even though property had been destroyed, structures were in place for the revitalisation of the tourist industry tied in with village life. Villagers' constant interactions with foreigners allowed them to identify the common trends, attitudes, perceptions and orientations in foreign interactions with villagers and their locality. Although lacking in comparable economic capital to foreigners, villagers were able to devise methods to retain control over their space through the partial control of entitlement to land. In the case of Gareth, his dependence on the local protection of his investment and Sunil and his brothers' dependence on the

extra capital generated by his property and gifts, allowed both parties an equal stake in the relationship. The brothers catered to Gareth's ego allowing him to dispense advice, especially when it suited their purpose. The utilitarian value of the relationship is confirmed by Lasantha's assertion that even though he is a nice man he is just here for business, suggesting that even Gareth is knowledgeable of the superficiality of the relationship.

Counter-imaginaries and self-exoticisation

In late April 2013 I was sitting at the tea shop by the beach in Po when a tourist couple walked past. The couple were looking from side to side questioningly and quite obviously lost. I approached them and after talking to them for a couple of minutes I inquired whether they needed a place to stay. They answered in the affirmative and I led them to Lasantha's guesthouse. They were an Austrian couple, Oliver and Kat, in their early thirties and had just arrived from the popular tourist beach of Hikkaduwa on the west coast. They told me that they had only stayed a night there and had sought to leave as soon as possible. Oliver said he was appalled, 'Hikkaduwa is a really terrible place - it's like a bad version of Ibiza. We want to see the real Sri Lanka so we came here'. Lasantha had spotted us from his room on the second floor and was already standing at the gate to greet the couple when we arrived at the guesthouse. Upon catching a glimpse of the internal yard of the guest house they instantly smiled. Oliver told me later that evening,

> When we arrived here I was already very happy. It looks like a normal Sri Lankan home. I saw the wife making the food on the floor and the children playing and the broken wall and the mango tree. This is how I imagined Sri Lanka.

That evening Lasantha invited the couple to a free home-cooked dinner, as was customary for him to do with new arrivals. When his wife cleared the table of empty dishes and went off to bed he glanced slyly about him, then pulled out a half-bottle of arrack and offered his guests a drink of what he described as 'typical Sri Lanka whiskey'. As we sat sipping our drinks Lasantha explained the activities he had to offer them, then he talked about the tsunami and his experience of it. It was a carefully rehearsed sequence I had witnessed and even participated in, countless times before. The couple opted to go out on the river the next morning to look for crocodiles using Lasantha's boat.

The next day in the early afternoon I was sitting outside the kitchen with Saran when the Austrian couple returned accompanied by Saran's brother, Chalana. They were all soaking wet. Chalana had accompanied the couple out on the river at Lasantha's request and they had taken their neighbour, Deepe, to steer the boat. Although Deepe was an able boatman, he was not familiar with the

currents and rocks around the point where the river meets the sea. Upon approaching the mouth of the river, Deepe had been steering the boat too quickly and a wave had hit their side and overturned the boat. They had all managed to scramble out of the water in time, all too aware that crocodiles might be lurking in the vicinity. With the help of some fishermen they had managed to pull the boat safely onto the beach, but the engine was beyond repair and so they left the boat lying in the sand till they could figure out how to haul it back to Po. Before leaving the guest house, Chalana made Oliver promise that he would come to his house that evening for a meal, then turned to me and said in earnest, 'Maurice you come too please.' Oliver and Kat were ecstatic. Oliver said,

> No one will believe us. The boat flipped and we fell into the river. Then Chalana shouted to get out quick because there might be crocodiles. It was really exciting. I hope the boat will be ok though.

That evening at Chalana's home, we were seated in the main living area. Ratnasiri and his wife were seated opposite us and Chalana and his wife were busy bringing dishes of food out to a large table. After a few moments of small talk and a number of questions from Oliver about the house and the village, Ratnasiri brought out a bottle of *arrack* and poured us each a drink. He signalled to Chalana who pulled me aside and said,

> Maurice maybe you can talk to them. You tell them we are very poor and no money for engine, anyway you know how to do. We need help for 25,000 rupees for fix the engine. You try, if no manage no problem, but you try.

I sat back down next to Oliver and Kat and noticed that Ratnasiri was now watching me intently. I looked at the couple who seemed to be thoroughly enjoying their experience and felt I couldn't bring myself to do what Chalana had asked me to. I asked the couple to re-tell their experience on the boat in a feeble move at attempting to approach the subject. Oliver gave an excited rendition of the event to Ratnasiri, with Chalana interjecting every now and again, until finally Chalana put on a pained expression and said, 'engine finished and no money to fix. We very poor, no?' There was immediate silence as the couple appeared thrown off-guard. I spent a few minutes explaining that the accident had dealt the family a financial blow and they could not afford the repairs to which the Austrian couple nodded. Kat looked dismayed and said, 'I wish we had the money to help, but we are also very poor'. Chalana and Ratnasiri seemed unconvinced. After the meal we chatted some more and then left. As we walked home Oliver turned to me and asked, 'Did they want us to pay?' I lied and said that I didn't know to which he added, 'If we had the money we would have liked to give them something. We understand they are poor and more people need to help them.'

The image of the poor and vulnerable villager is a dominant one among tourists and travellers along coastal Sri Lanka. The tsunami aftermath further aided in the consolidation of this imaginary. Newspapers and television stations globally, published images of destruction and poverty in Sri Lanka and NGOs marketed their recovery efforts through similar images of vulnerable Sri Lankans on posters and in ad campaigns. Villagers are conscious of foreign and tourist imaginaries of them and these imaginaries play an important role in villagers' articulation of the disaster and their own images of themselves. For example, Ratnasiri and his family are quite well-off by village standards and Ratnasiri is a proud man and well-known locally for his generosity. Why would he be willing then to paint a picture of himself as poor and vulnerable? This is especially puzzling as Ratnasiri and other villagers frequently spoke with contempt of other Sri Lankans who, in the aftermath of the disaster, used every means at their disposal to receive aid. Many villagers spoke of these 'other Sri Lankans' as acting 'like beggars'.

Throughout my many years in Po I have witnessed the exchanges between villagers and tourists staying at my friends' establishments. In 2005, when I first arrived in Po, foreign NGO workers and volunteers were identified by villagers as the distributors of aid in the area. For the period between 2005 and 2008 NGO workers were also the largest category of guests at guest houses along the coast. When tourism picked up again after the tsunami and again after the end of the war, some tourists and travellers were drawn to the North and East by the allure of experiencing a post-war landscape. Conversely, tourists were drawn to the southern coast by the pristine beaches and stretches of new and modern tourist establishments to welcome them. In addition, tourists and travellers to the south of the island express curiosity at the remnants they see of tsunami homes and the narratives of sorrow that accompany them (cf. Skinner 2012). Villagers are accustomed to foreigners' fascination with their plight. They observed that both NGO workers and tourists alike were generous in dispensing of aid and money at the mention of the tsunami or poverty. My own experience of observing encounters between villagers and foreigners has changed over the years. In 2005, many of my village friends had initially refused to receive aid out of shame. In fact, Saran had told me that for the two years after the tsunami they had struggled to get by. She had refused to collect food and household items that were being freely distributed by NGOs during this period. She told me, 'If someone see us doing that, then very bad for us. Then they say we low. I don't like this.'

The construction of large luxury homes, hotels and the lavish vehicles and budgets of NGO staff jarred against the modest day to day living of village Sinhalese. Foreigners, in particular tourists, were not a part of village life and were not connected to any village social networks. Accepting gifts and money from foreigners was usually done covertly. In the latter situations, it was highly unlikely

that other villagers would find out about these gifts, especially when donations were received from tourists who were in the area for only a short time. Some youths in Po bandied together and competed to see who could most easily fool tourists into giving them money by acting out stories of despair and suffering. The youths' actions were regarded with disapproval by many of the other villagers. Of my friends in Po, all voiced their same disapproval at the youths' actions. Yet, my friends also covertly accepted gifts and money from foreigners.

Since the tsunami, the gradual influx of foreigners to the village and their increased interactions with villagers eventually normalised these encounters. Over the years foreigners became a normal part of every day village life in Po. The receipt of gifts and aid, which was initially described as shame-inducing by many villagers, also became normalised. Many villagers regarded tourists and other foreigners as wealthy and identified themselves as poor in comparison. In fact, throughout my fieldwork my attempts at explaining that I was a cash-strapped student were mostly met with scepticism. Village youths fed the image of their poverty and vulnerability through the creation of elaborate narratives and were rewarded for their efforts with gifts of mobile phones, money and even home appliances (mostly washing machines, fridges or freezers). However, this was also the case for other villagers who had become acquainted with tourist imaginaries of them and the rewards that came if they corresponded to these imaginaries. In the case of Oliver and Kat, Ratnasiri was content to act out the role of the poor, struggling village Sri Lankan. His experience of tourists, similar to other villagers, was that they looked for this difference and were often disappointed in finding the opposite. In the company of other villagers Ratnasiri displayed all the characteristics of his status: generosity, frequent hosting of social events and investment in property for him and his family. In many ways, the contributions he received from foreigners allowed him to uphold this status.

Negotiating identity at a distance

In the introduction to this chapter I expressed an interest in the ways identities are negotiated or re-negotiated in view of diverging expectations of ideals or rooted perceptions of dominant imaginaries. I further argue that these perceptions take root in this context in the interventions that followed the Asian tsunami of 2004. Edward Simpson writing about the aftermath of the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat states that, 'moments of catastrophe influence the ways in which people know the world and what its certainties are' (Simpson 2013: 20). He goes on to write that these events feed into social life in the aftermath, whether this is the view of the all-powerful foreigner in

Thomale, or the manipulable expatriate in Po. In turn, Bruce Kapferer asserts that '[e]verything and anything is potentially in an exotic relation' (Kapferer 2013: 815). Kapferer's concern here is with the way we think about the exotic in Anthropology and how this has evolved over time, and it is owing to the particular and, some might say, unfortunate connection that Anthropology has had with the exotic that the term is often replaced by other, friendlier terms such as 'culture, difference, and otherness' (Kapferer 2013:816). Similarly Graham Watson describes anthropologists' preoccupation with the exotic as an 'institutionalized incompetence' (Watson 1991: 89) and anthropologists as nurturing a dependency on the native's point of view, whilst ignoring the native's own need to create meaning and give sense to their world, their interactions and our interactions with it and them. Thus the engagement with the exotic is potentially fraught with contradictions, when is one exoticizing, and when is one being exoticized?

Exoticization in this context may be seen as a narrative of control that as well as shaping the imaginary of the other, shapes the imaginary of the self in juxtaposition to the other. In the first case study villagers in Thomale attempted to counter the image of the powerful foreigner by relating a narrative that imbued them with power and control over the foreign couple and their own village. Similarly, in the second case study villagers in Po depict foreigners as easily manipulable and allow them interference in their own lives and to give expression to their sense of superiority. However, Lasantha makes it clear that the relationship is utilitarian. In Gareth's absence they voice their discord, just as youths in Po joke about the foreigners they fooled. The distance between foreigners and locals is reflective of the distance in the aftermath of the tsunami that shaped imaginaries of the other. Thus, in both case studies identities are negotiated at a distance, with villagers and foreigners each simultaneously exoticizing and being exoticized. Michael Gilsenan (1996) has noted that narrative and counter-narrative between rival or unequal groups form the basis of power contestations and self-determination and, in each form of narrative there may be very little truth about actual events. However, they reveal much about underlying 'structures of meaning' (Bruner 1986). Thus, the case studies I presented here illustrate that exoticization is never unidirectional and are reflective of the power structures at play as a result of post-tsunami recovery.

In this chapter I have detailed some villagers' and foreigners' imaginaries of the other, as well as the tensions that arise between these two groups over the control of land. In the next chapter I take this discussion one step further by elucidating how villagers in Po utilise the ritual of the *bahiravā puja* to further express tensions with outsiders over the appropriation and privatisation of village land.

Chapter 7 – The boundaries between order and disorder

Around the beginning of May 2013, I was looking at the *aloo puhul* (a dried ash pumpkin wrapped with rope and left hanging at certain points in a home or business). It was hanging outside my terrace just above Lasantha's makeshift restaurant. I noticed that it seemed to have shrunk over the past months. I headed downstairs for a tea and a chat with Saran and I asked her about the *aloo puhul*. She said, 'That is the *aloo puhul*, every time somebody saying something about our house or our business, it going to that. Many time saying then getting smaller.' I asked her if it was due to people saying bad things about them and their business and she explained that it was when someone desired or coveted something of theirs. If people continually thought about others' good fortune then it resulted in bad luck for the latter; their luck would change. The *aloo puhul* is seen by villagers as one of the many objects for neutralising malevolence, a form of control that maintains the bounded-ness of sites, people and social activities. Luck [*subha*] was a regular topic of many conversations and villagers indicated that one could read the signs in the land and in certain animals. I was told by various villagers that one could also change their luck or take steps to steer it in the right direction; this was dependent on one's karma – the condition of which could also be determined with the aid of the soothsayer [*sāsthra kāraya*]. Luck, so I was told by Lasantha and other villagers, travelled through the land and affected the motion and presence of natural phenomena. Sightings of animals at particular times of the day were also seen as indicators of the road one should take on a particular day and the activities one should engage or not engage in.

Spirits of the dead or ghosts [*prēta*] were frequently talked about in both the villages of Po and Thomale. Strange occurrences such as the sudden disappearance of household items, misplaced objects or feelings of confusion were often attributed to the mischievous meddling of *prēta*. Villagers, particularly in Po, noted how sightings of *prēta* had increased drastically since the tsunami and they attributed this phenomenon to the sudden and simultaneous death of so many villagers. In this chapter I argue that sightings of *prēta* represent a form of collective memory of the tsunami. Narratives of encounters with *prēta* also draw out discourses of land and the legitimacy to occupy that land. I illustrate how villagers deal with problems that may essentially be beyond their control. I also look at how villagers' notion of luck [*subha*] may have adverse effects on an individual's ability to control or envision their lives and thus, visits to the *sāsthra kāraya* provide an alternative avenue whereby villagers can attribute an imagined order to their everyday lives. The loss of space, business and in some cases autonomy, as a result of post-tsunami development and the requisition of land, has led to the resurgence *en masse* of the *bahiravā puja*, a ritual aimed at the expulsion of

prēta from the land, or at least understood as such by villagers in Po. George Frerks writing about post-tsunami rebuilding in Sri Lanka observes:

> Traditional healing ceremonies and ritual blessings (*bahirawa puja*) were performed for the protection of land, house, and property against disaster. *Pirith* chanting was done at public places as a purification ceremony and to offer merit to the deceased. *Thovils* (devil dances) were carried out for the emotional stabilization and support of victims (Frerks 2010: 154).

Whilst Jonathan Spencer writes that, 'offerings of incense may be made at a pit to placate the *bahirayā*, the protectors of the earth's riches' (Spencer 1990a: 120). Most references indicate that the *bahiravā* is a guardian spirit of the earth or a treasure. However, locals in Po explain that the *bahiravā puja* is a ritual for the expulsion of *prēta* from land or property, where they are likely to impede any further developments to the land should they be allowed to remain.

The *prēta* may be previous owners of the land, close family members, or other deceased villagers. They represent a link to the past and continuity with the present, whereby a sense of community and attachment to land is re-established through the ritual of the *bahiravā puja*. The *prēta* as representatives of a past life are expelled to make way for new beginnings, a fresh start. As Spencer (1990a) observes, and as I have been told on numerous occasions, the *prētas* are the spirits/ghosts of people who have died and left this world with an excess of desire [*āsāva*], either an excess of hate for an individual, an excess of love and attachment to a particular person, or towards earthly possessions. They are depicted as miserable souls, tormented by insatiable longing and desire, which cannot be fulfilled. The *bahiravā* ritual in Po entails the expulsion of the ghost of previous owners and remnants of the past to create a space for the peaceful settlement of new land owners, as well as to link the land with the community to which the owners form a part. The ritual is also carried out for foreigners with whom there are strong relations, i.e. foreigners who have become internalised into the community. Those foreigners and outsiders who are seen as external to the village do not have the ritual performed for them. *Prēta* remain attached to the land in the latter cases. Even though the land has been colonised by the outsiders, villagers see the *prēta* as retaining ownership of the land until the ritual is performed. Control of land is thus achieved through the *puja* when access to land is restricted through its privatisation.

The ritual and narratives that accompany it represent ways of coping with the uncertainties of everyday life and with explaining them. They serve therefore, as a discourse of social order. In the next section I look at the role of the *sāsthra kāraya* and villagers' notions of luck, as well as the ways in which villagers attempt to control and give meaning to their lives.

The *sāsthra kāraya*

I was living in Thomale in May 2012, and it was around this time that Lasantha invited me to join him and his family on a visit to the *sāsthra kāraya* a few kilometres inland from where they lived. He was enthusiastic about me joining them and he told me,

> I been to many *sāstras* before, but they not real ones, always lying, this one she very good, she tell me everything in my past, what I do last week – she see all – I believe her. Before Saran no believe, then I take her and *sāsthra* look at her – she say "oh you don't believe in me", then she tell her she went to the shop in the morning and she tell her what she buy for the home, after that Saran believe all.

On the day I was meant to join Lasantha at the *sāsthra kāraya* I made my way to his house at 5.30pm where I found the family getting ready. Lasantha was dressed in neat clean trousers, a freshly ironed shirt and polished black shoes. His wife was wearing a long neat white dress and had just blow dried her hair. Their four year old son was also neatly dressed and I suddenly felt self-conscious about having turned up in only jeans, a shirt and sandals. This was further heightened by Lasantha's look of disapproval at my attire. Lasantha's daughters were getting ready to go to their grandparents' home. Lasantha told me, 'Not good for the girls to come, sometimes they get scared then difficult to sleep.' We all hopped into the van and drove for five miles or so, then pulled off the main road and drove through the thick foliage for a few more miles over a broken jungle path and parked on a little slope a few metres from three solitary houses surrounded by paddy fields and clumps of trees, thickly entwined together. He indicated the house to me. As we walked over I made out a spacious driveway leading up to a traditional Sri Lankan house, similar to others I saw on a daily basis in the village. To the left of the driveway was an open clearing with a shrine at the far end and there was also a *lingam* with prayer beads draped over it.[26] A square rail was positioned by the side of the shrine. The rail enclosed a large granite boulder around which were broken fragments of coconut husk. The perimeter of the shrine area was lined with burning incense sticks and the flickering wicks of oil lamps. Around the perimeter of the house, past the shrine, were two women and a man waiting and beyond towards the back of the house, was a separate structure with drapes and incense. Flickers of candlelight and a silhouette could be seen moving behind the drapes.

Lasantha and Saran greeted the other women hesitantly, then Lasantha pulled me aside and said, 'oh no, they are from Po, we know them – this is not good – I do not want them or other people

[26] It was explained to me that it was not uncommon to find symbols and artefacts of different faiths at the *sāstra kariya*'s.

from the village to know what we do'. On their part, the women looked shocked to see Lasantha and after having greeted each other, they turned their backs toward us.

Saran remained in the driveway with their son, whilst Lasantha led me down the path, 'better we don't stay there, maybe they ask us something'. We crept into a gap between the trees that opened up onto a small lake and as we rested our backs against the trunks I asked Lasantha why it was so terrible that the women had seen him. He said,

> Not nice for people to know what we do, then they too much bla bla. We are big family in Po, everyone know us, maybe something happen to our enemies then they think it us, they think "ah they went to the *sāsthra* for the mantra", then maybe they go do the same for us, then big problem.

We were in a scenic spot by the lake. Lasantha sighed and said, 'Very nice place, when I get the money I want to buy some land in a place like this for the family – I don't like the home and business together.' He had said the same thing on other occasions and the frequent visits to the *sāsthra kāraya*, together with the need to evaluate his luck seemed to be more of a recent strategy to cope with the problems the business invited. He had attributed the problems of living in Po to being constantly surrounded by friends and enemies. In particular he linked his anxiety to the actions of other family members who required favours from him in their bid to advance socially and economically. On pressing him further about this point, he had responded by saying that living in close proximity to family had its problems as well as its benefits. On one occasion he said,

> With the brothers very difficult, they do something for their business then problem coming back to me, they are family no? I cannot say no, but maybe if I am not there and not so many problems after. Sometimes I ask the *sāsthra* for help, then she tell me what to do, then if I do, I am not worried.

He explained what had brought him to the *sāsthra kāraya* on this particular visit,

> last week one American man came to Po, he was very dirty and look very tired. I see him on the beach and I start talking to him. He told me he came from Galle and had no money now. He used all his money to buy bus ticket here. He said he escaped Galle, all his luggage in Colombo and he have more money there. He asked me if I know somewhere to stay for the night, but he cannot pay now. In Galle he was spending a lot of money, then some boys see him, they see he has money, and when he drinking too much they rob him and he run away

and he come here. He said they take almost two lakh[27] for him, then he scared to go to the police, I don't know why. But anyhow I believe him, maybe he lying, it's possible, but I say I believe him. I told him he can stay my place for free, then I give him food and money for the bus. Anyway if he lying, still good *karma* for me so I am happy. He start crying and tell us we are good people and he give me his American number, and say he want to help us and when he get home he will send us some money for help the business. Maurice, I want to believe him, so I come to the *sāsthra* to ask her what this man is like, if he help us, and if I should believe him. I want to ask her how is my luck.

We made our way back to the house after around half an hour to be met by Lasantha's brothers arriving just then. They had also come to see the *sāsthra kāraya* with their wives. Their children had remained at home. I was talking to Asanka, Lasantha's younger brother – curious as to why he had shown up. His wife was from a well off family in Colombo who shunned such rituals that they deemed diverted from the accepted practice of Buddhism. Asanka himself had also always seemed averse to them. As we chatted nonchalantly about our daily routines he said all of a sudden, 'Is this for your book? I don't believe in this fucking shit.' He used the word 'fucking' liberally around me to explain rituals, habits and events, and it was always followed by a series of gleeful giggles. It occurred to me that he used it only in the presence of foreigners in what seemed to be an imitation of their disdain for 'local superstition' (a term that I heard various British expats use to describe local rituals). I asked Asanka why he was here if he didn't believe in the revelations of the *sāsthra kāraya*, and he said, 'I come to support my brother.'

When we returned to the house, the other women from the village had left. Lasantha and Saran made their way up the two steps that led to the open room at the back of the house, together with their son. They carried with them a *puja* tray laden with fruit, incense and money. They stood in front of a fine string boundary separating them from the *sāsthra kāraya* who was concealed behind thin see-through drapes, behind which was a raised mattress, lit oil lamps and burning incense. The *sāsthra kāraya* was draped in colourful cloth. She took the *puja* tray from them. They pressed the palms of their hands together against their chest and looked down as the *sāsthra kāraya* began to pray and chant. The *sāsthra kāraya*, whom Lasantha had told me was referred to as *Maha devi* (great goddess, which Lasantha explained means great mother), lit a bundle of incense sticks and started reciting prayers again. At certain points she began talking in tongues and Lasantha later informed me that even the *sāsthra* might not understand the words coming out of her mouth. This, he said after the ceremony, is what is called *āruda*. He told me,

[27] 2 lakh = 200,000 rupees, around 1000GBP

> it is coming from the gods, we cannot understand it, she hear it and she talking for the gods. That is how she know she is *sāstra,* when she get *āruda*.

She then talked to Lasantha and Saran individually, revealing details of each one's life that only they knew. This was taken as proof that she indeed had the power to see what others could not. Lasantha then proceeded to explain his dilemma regarding the American man, as well as expressing curiosity as to the state of his *karma*. He later explained that the *sāsthra kāraya* told him that they could trust the American man – their aura was good and they had good *karma*. Lasantha had explained that she could see the aura around them, the light that every person had about them, which he described as 'the light of the inside' [*gunaya*]. The *sāsthra kāraya* then proceeded to pray for the fulfilment of their desires. Lasantha explained that did not specifically refer to help from the American man; the *sāsthra* could read luck but not control it. Lasantha explained that she had prayed for them to have luck with money. Lasantha wanted to purchase the English owned beach house in Po that was then up for sale (referred to in Chapter 4). His elder brother, Sunil, had argued with the owners and angered them into selling the property. Lasantha saw this as an example of how his family obligations cut into his own business. Once the prayers were over the coconuts in the *puja* tray were coated with a dollop of coconut butter and set alight. With the coconuts alight Lasantha and his wife proceeded back down the two steps to the shrine, stood in front of it with the coconuts raised and turned them clockwise three times. They uttered prayers throughout. Lasantha waited for the flame to die out then proceeded to the fenced granite rock and smashed the coconut on it. The coconut must shatter and the open parts must fall face up for their prayers to be answered. Lasantha later told me that this too was *āruda*. I asked him what he meant and he said:

> That the power coming from the gods. If our luck is good then the gods help us. One time in Kataragama, very old lady she very small, take the coconut and break. She cannot have that power, that only coming from *āruda*.

Lasantha and his wife walked back up to the *sāsthra kāraya* who tied a protective white thread [*äpa nūl*] around their wrists, winding it three times clockwise whilst chanting over it. The chanting over the *äpa nūl* sanctifies it and is meant to protect the wearer. The wearer must abstain from eating pork or beef, as well as abstain from consuming alcohol, smoking cigarettes, or chewing *bulath* (betel) for three days after for it to be effective. Lasantha claims that it is in fact the three meals after the ceremony and not three days, however his cousin and younger brother have claimed otherwise.

Three months after the visit to the *sāsthra kāraya* I asked Lasantha if the American had ever called back and if he had offered the help he had promised. Lasantha replied in the negative and I asked if this had changed his opinion of the *sāsthra kāraya* and the veracity of her claims, to which he responded, 'No, she talking about the good *karma* coming, maybe not him, she cannot see all sometimes. But anyway maybe something happen to him too, maybe his luck change.' It seemed that the divinations offered by the *sāsthra kāraya* served as a form of settlement for the mind, a reassurance that luck was working in their favour and that actions that seemed beyond their control were now somehow manageable – they could go about their daily lives with peace of mind. To re-quote Lasantha, 'Sometimes I ask the *sāsthra* for help, then she tell me what to do, then if I do, I am not worried.' In fact, when in March 2013 I returned to the field after a two month absence, a beaming Lasantha told me that he had found the money for the beach property in time and I was reminded of the *sāsthra kāraya.*

Figure 20 The *sāsthra kāraya* at the entrance to her room of divination.

The visits to the *sāsthra kāraya* represent a ritual in themselves – a structured process whereby order is revealed through the organisation of the ritual process. The house is located in a remote area far from villages and the main town, requiring a journey to be made. The fact that the *sāsthra kāraya* is in an isolated location also limits the chances of rumours circulating about her and her

visitors and the ritual process retains a shroud of mystery and anonymity. The layout of the house itself is organised in an ordered sequence, such that each step of the ritual is clearly marked out in the design and positioning of the shrine, the *lingam*, the *sāsthra kāraya's* room and the entrance to the main house. Those people waiting to be received by the *sāsthra kāraya* may do so relatively concealed from others that may be around. Much is at stake and people do not visit the *sāsthra kāraya* solely for matters of *karma*, luck and fortune-telling, yet also for the fulfilment of justice and revenge. These details, together with the style of the *sāsthra kāraya*'s divinations are what identify her as genuine.

Concealment and anonymity are central themes to the ritual, as evidenced by Lasantha's reaction to seeing people he knew there and more importantly, people who know him. It tells us much about the role of the *sāsthra kāraya* as an intermediary between public and private and the transgression of boundaries between the two spaces – why else would one come here? Being seen at the *sāsthra kāraya* may be interpreted by others as a sign of vulnerability and is indicative of uncertainty in that person's life. Furthermore, the covertness of the whole affair may invite unwelcome assumptions and gossip. The fact that Lasantha is part of a well-known and influential family also raises fears that knowledge of the visit may be used as leverage against them. The visit to the *sāsthra kāraya* is also considered to be somewhat unaligned with widely accepted Buddhist practices; it utilises foreign symbols – the *lingam*, talk with the gods and sometimes the use of *vas kavi* (translated as evil poems, sometimes used in conjunction with curses or mantras with ill intent). It thus represents a further transgression of boundaries between the official and the unofficial, between the world of humans and the world of gods, the physical and non-physical and between official justice and covert unofficial justice. In this way, the *sāsthra kāraya* also represents an alternative to institutions (such as police, law courts, planning authorities etc.) that have failed those seeking her counsel.

The disorder in Lasantha's life surfaces clearly in the narrative that accompanies the visit to the *sāsthra kāraya*. He talks of his desire to have a home away from the village, to separate his domestic life from his business life. He also expresses his frustration at having to fulfil obligations to his brothers as a result of stringent family hierarchy and its associated roles and responsibilities. In a detailed summary of his many woes, Lasantha also explained that his obligations to his brothers sometimes cut into his own business which he found hectic enough as his guest house also served as his home. Furthermore, because of constant contact with guests he found himself unable to dedicate enough time to his own family. This was especially the case in recent months. An elderly Austrian lady, Estelle, had moved into the guest house permanently and Lasantha found her to be excessively demanding and constantly in need of attention. Lasantha's domestic situation is a good

example of what he deems to be the main source of disorder in his life, where in his view business and family do not belong together and the acquisition of land elsewhere may provide a way out. The structure and order of the ritual visit to the *sāsthra kāraya* already provides a soothing contrast to the disorder in the visitor's life, as evidenced by Lasantha's relief following the visit.

During the consultation ritual, the fine string boundary [*äpa nūl*] that separates the *sāsthra kāraya* from her patients is an indication of the wider boundaries at play, between the human world and the world of the deities between which the *sāsthra kāraya* moves through the medium of *āruda*. The revelation of past personal events and talking in tongues are taken as proof of the endowment of *āruda*. The latter gives her an alternative sight, the ability to see and move between two worlds, as well as an ability to identify auras [*gunaya*]. Through these abilities the *sāsthra kāraya* offers alternatives to the uncertainties that trouble her visitors, where in the case of Lasantha she offered the assurance that money would come to him and that he needn't worry. Asanka also explained that the most frequent visitors to the *sāsthra kāraya* included people hoping to: exact revenge against ex-lovers, to ascertain that their partners were not having affairs and to find a solution to disputes over land and money. These represent situations beyond one's control or questions to which the answers are concealed, much like the unpredictable and hidden world of deities. The tying of the *äpa nūl* marks the closing of the ritual, it serves as a boundary separating *sāsthra kāraya* and visitor, as a fencing off of the unpredictable worlds of the deities [*deva*], demons [*yakku*] and ghosts [*prēta*], from that of humans.

Narratives of *prēta*

The *prēta* have been the topic of numerous of my discussions with villagers, especially with the family and friends of Lasantha. The *prēta* are an ever present force to be reckoned with and with whom reconciliation may sometimes become akin to an obligation. As Lasantha put it on one occasion in late April 2013,

> the *prēta*, they love the family too much, or food, or possessions, sometimes they love the land too much. We go into the next life, we always want to come back to the same place.

A few days later I was having my morning tea with Saran and catching up on our gossip. The children were at school and Lasantha was away in Colombo with the van. The tea and chat had become a routine with Saran and I could see her unwind as she talked. On these occasions she told me all about what had been going on in the neighbouring houses, what she had heard, who had done

what, what the brothers were actually concerned about when they met up outside the house and engaged in whispered conversation. On this occasion in late April 2013, I picked on the topic of *prēta* again. I asked her, 'What are the *prēta* exactly, and what do they do?'

She responded with, '*prēta* coming from dead people, like a ghost. Sometimes they love somebody too much, or they love the land they don't want to leave, then very bad for us.' After a short pause and a sip of tea she said,

> you know Maurice, we have the land behind father's house, next to Indu house, there have problem with *prēta*, next week coming *kattadiyā* for remove them. If you like you come, but don't tell Estelle, *aiyo* then very difficult with her, she shout to us, she don't like we spend the money on this, but this is our belief.

This ritual performed by the *kattadiyā* is known as the *bahiravā puja* and is meant to dispel any *prēta* of previous owners of the land, who at their death may have remained attached to the land. [28] However, Saran informed me that in many cases of the purchase of a new plot of land or house, the *puja* is not performed due to the expense and often takes place only after problems have occurred in the initial construction of the house as a result of the *prēta* meddling. The ritual is conducted when the presence of *prēta* is identified by the ritual specialist [*kattadiyā*]. In some cases, Saran explained, *prēta* may evolve into minor demons [*yakku*].

Spencer (1990a) and Brow (1996), among others, have noted that *bahiravā* refers to a guardian spirit, more specifically a guardian of buried treasure and the *bahiravā puja* is a ritual whereby a spirit is bound to the land to protect it. However, locals in Po have explained to me that the *puja* is most often used to rid the land or home of a malevolent spirit of a dead person [*mala prēta*]. When I approached Lasantha about the *bahiravā puja* he explained that the *puja* had another role previously, as he put it - 'in ancient times'. He related the following story:

> One of the kings long time ago, he had much gold and he very afraid that somebody want to take his gold. He go out into the street and he bring in one beggar, he take the beggar to look at his gold, then he asking him 'you like this?' and the beggar saying, 'Yes I like'. Then the king tell him 'you go, take the gold if you like', then when the beggar go over the gold, king's bodyguard cut off his head from behind. Then the king put the beggar's body with the gold, the beggar become *prēta* so he always taking care of the gold, nobody can touch, he love the gold too much.

[28] This was the name of a *yakka* who used to prey on women, and for whom a woman was sacrificed every year. In other accounts *bahiravās* are said to be earth spirits (see Larsen 1998, Fernando 2000).

In contrast to the latter story, Saran, Lasantha's wife, recounted another instance when the *bahiravā puja* was performed for foreign expats who had built a house in the village:

> When we building the house for Lucien we also do. They not here that time, they were in Belgium, but we making – we get the *kattadiyā* and he saying there one lady on the land. After we do the *bahiravā puja* and *kattadiyā* talk to *prēta*. He ask her what she want, then she say "oh give me saris and *lunu bilin"* (a sour fruit cut and mixed with salt), and many other things and we must go and find. Sometimes we don't have what she ask, but we must go and ask people if they have this.

She continued by explaining that they spent the night collecting items of food or garments that the *prēta* wanted, as an exchange for her to leave the land. On this occasion the *prēta* left after having been given the items she asked for. Most of these items consisted of her favourite food when she was alive, or specific garments or objects that reminded her of her life, either through things she owned or coveted. Saran explained:

> This is coming from her memory, the *prēta* they love the life too much, they don't want to give it up. This no good, but Lasantha he feel sorry for *prēta* because difficult for them to go to next life, they have too much *thanhā* (greed).

In this particular case, the foreign couple for whom the *puja* was performed were close friends of the family who had financially aided Lasantha and his brothers and whose home had become a second home for the brothers. This was unlike in other cases where outsiders had kept their distance from villagers and erected walls to enclose their properties, shutting villagers and the village out. Villagers believed that the latter expats' land and property were plagued by *prēta*; they had not performed the *puja* and would not be happy living there as a result. The *prēta,* although afflicted by desire and attachment, were still part of a past life of the village. The *prēta* inhabited social memory and they inhabited the land. In this way the land would always be affiliated with the village, and not with the outsiders, unless they were removed. Those foreigners like Lucien who integrated and participated in village life had the *puja* performed for them. This was an indication of villagers' desired relationships with outsiders.

As Kapferer notes, speaking specifically about *yakku* in this case, although the same may be applied to *prēta*, 'They embody emotional and behavioural orientations which emerge from, and result in attachment to, this world, an attachment which in itself is viewed as a cause of suffering (*duka*)' (Kapferer 1979: 155). This is very much in keeping with core Buddhist values that elucidate the pain and suffering caused by desire and attachment. The *prēta* are similar to foreign expats and their

desire to keep the land for themselves and keep villagers out. In this way villagers associated *prēta* to some foreign expats. Villagers often talked of their experiences with *prēta*, which invariably led to a description of the site of the apparition, the clothes the *prēta* wore and their actions during the appearance of the apparition. Villagers attempted an identification of the deceased in question, their vices, why they thought they had come back as *prēta*. Stories of sightings were presented to me as a lesson in the perils of desire [*āsāva*]. Villagers also drew on individual and collective memories and the *dhamma* to explain these apparitions.[29] Jon Mitchell (1997) has noted, with reference to religious experience in Malta, that religious belief in this context draws on 'ready-made memories' to explain unusual experiences. In Malta it is the bible and in Sri Lanka it is the *dhamma* that provide a set of narratives that serve as guidelines for the experience. These texts are drummed into and become a part of individual memory through the process of religious indoctrination and in this way provide a context for the unusual and the inexplicable to be explained. Mitchell states in this regard that, 'These structured experiences act as a blueprint or reference-point for people's subsequent experiences' (Mitchell 1997: 81).

Saran told me that Indu, Lasantha's father's neighbour who performed chores for the family, had also had a *prēta* on his land. On hearing this I paid a visit to Lasantha's father, Hamzi, where I found Indu and I asked them about the *prēta* on Indu's land. Indu explained that he had for many weeks been distracted, forgetting where he had placed objects about the house, losing money and miscalculating distances. He thought he was going mad. He would prepare rice for the day and when he heaped it onto a plate and looked away for a moment he would look back to discover that a big chunk of it at the edge of the plate was missing. He also began to notice that many objects about the house were suddenly not where they should have been. In the days before he decided to hold an exorcism [*thovil*], Indu claimed to have seen a man in a vest and blue sarong at the edge of his land who would be gone as soon as his attention was diverted elsewhere. At the *puja* Indu said he felt chills rising through his body, which the *kattadiyā* explained was the presence of the *prēta* beside him. The *kattadiyā* instructed the people attending to hold a stretched sheet behind him whilst he talked to the *prēta*, in that way they could see and hear the thump of the *prēta* against the sheet. The *kattadiyā* explained that the spirit was that of the previous owner, but there were also others there that had remained linked to the land. He explained that using a camera they could sometimes catch images of the spirit. When Indu proceeded to do so he caught the image of a shadow with a devil's face, which the *kattadiyā* explained belonged to a woman who had died during the tsunami.

[29] The teachings of the Buddha

For Sinhalese-Buddhists, the hierarchical order of beings is represented by Buddha at the top, followed by the deities, *yakku* and *prēta*, with humans being above demons but below deities (Kapferer 1979: 156; Obeyesekere 1977). Indu describes a personal crisis where he is unable to perform everyday tasks normally over an extended period of time. Something is amiss and the *thovil* restores the normal state of affairs by appeasing the *prēta* and removing their disorderly meddling. The *prēta* here are made to represent the lingering memories of death, loss and change following the tsunami. *Thovils* and *bahiravā pujas* are communal affairs that invite group participation and invoke expressions of unity. They thus serve as a discursive and therapeutic tool for overcoming afflictions that plague not only one individual but also a whole group of individuals. Throughout the ritual, *prēta* and *yakku* are depicted as pathetic beings and the purveyors of disorder [*akramavath*]. They are attributed characteristics that in humans are seen to be an impediment to healthy and orderly living.

Following the talk with Indu about his experience with the *prēta* and *thovil*, I was then told by Hamzi that they too had a problem with a *prēta* a while back. For over a week they had been aware of a bad smell emanating from their bedroom, a smell similar to dry fish [*karavala*]. They searched the room, took out all the furniture and searched the rest of the house for the source of the stench but found nothing. They thought a rat may have died somewhere in the room, but they found nothing. They visited the *sāsthra kāraya*, who told them that Manique, Hamzi's wife, had not been sleeping alone. For a while now the *prēta* of a previous land owner from the area, a lady, had been sleeping in the same bed. After that they approached the *kattadiyā,* who lived behind their house, about performing a *thovil* for them. During the *thovil* they were instructed to bring tea with jaggery for the *prēta*. The *kattadiyā* told them that after the *prēta* took it she began crying and wailing uncontrollably; she said she would not leave. He explained that she was the same *prēta* who had occupied Piyasiri's land two houses further down. They had performed a *thovil* to get rid of her. She was the previous owner of the land. She said she had many plots of land and she went to every plot. He asked her why she had come to Hamzi's land, to which she responded that it was the closest she could get to Piyasiri's home. It had been her land, she had sold it to them and he had still to pay her an amount of money – he only paid for half the land. Hamzi said he remembered the owner and remembered her selling the land, but she had died shortly after, so Piyasiri could not pay the rest and they never heard from any family members. She then asked them for a sari and a blouse and the villagers brought them for her but still she would not leave. She continued crying and would not stop crying and refused to leave the land. The *kattadiyā* implored her to leave, he told her that they had given her what she wanted, she should forget about Piyasiri as she could not use the money now anyway. She still refused and continued with her wailing. The *kattadiyā* then used the ritual

torch [*pandama*] to push her off the land, throwing powdered tree resin [*dhummala*] that ignites in the process. Both are said to burn the *prēta*.

The following morning whilst buying cigarettes from Ratnasiri's (Saran's father) stall on the beach, I asked him whether he had any experiences with *prēta*. He told me that only two weeks before, at the corner to the path leading to his house, he had seen a man who had died fifteen years earlier. It was mid-day and the man was waiting at the gate to the path as he used to do when he was still alive. He added that mid-day and midnight are the optimum times for such encounters and crossroads and junctions are the places where sightings are most common.

Later that same day when I returned to my room Lasantha knocked on my door for a drink. He had stashed a bottle of *arrack* away in my room, as his wife was on a mission to curb his drinking and had discovered all of his usual hiding places. He slid through the door, closed it behind him, pulled the bottle from under the bed, sat down and poured himself a drink. I began to relate the stories I had been told throughout the previous days and he nodded as I did so. He said,

> This all true. Sometimes *prēta* don't want to leave the land, then *kattadiyā* using mantra, then catching in the bottle. After he close the bottle he throwing in the sea, *aiyo* like this not possible coming back into the re-born life, maybe stuck hundred thousand years. For this reason nobody ever opening bottles coming with the waves. One time Indu open one bottle, then one man following him, he saying the mantra then that man gone, nobody know where. For *thovil* he tell you? He catching one *prēta* with the mobile phone, then after two days he delete it, he scared, not good to keep that.

I asked him, 'So how does the *kattadiyā* put the *prēta* in the bottle?' He answered,

> He used the mantra. Now they putting the concrete slab around the bottle, then throwing in the sea, then never coming for the rebirth. This I don't like, I feel very sad for these people. We know them no? Before, they our friends – sometimes our family.

Bahiravā Puja

In early May 2013 when I was having tea with Saran, she reminded me that they would be holding the *bahiravā puja* on their land that evening. She informed me that Lasantha had already gone to the land and was helping with the preparations. She said that if I wanted I could go and join him. Then she told me in a hushed voice, 'Remember don't tell Estelle, she get very angry. She don't like

that we spend this money on this and anyway she coming then very difficult, she want something all the time.' I nodded in agreement and made my way to the land and as I was cycling Lasantha's cousin passed me on a motorbike laden with sacks and shouted out, '*Lasantha ge waththa ta yanne?*' (Are you on your way to Lasantha's land?). Many others were also involved in the preparations of what was clearly a significant event and a laborious task.

As I entered the patch of land I found the *kattadiyā* preparing an offering stand [*thattuva*]. Lasantha was clearing some sticks and brambles from patches of the land. As soon as he saw me he jerked up, began explaining what the *kattadiyā* was doing and offered to show me his house which was around fifty metres from Lasantha's land.

Figure 21 The *kattadiyā* preparing the *thattuva* for the *bahiravā puja*.

In front of the *kattadiyā's* home was a clearing of paved cement at the far end of which was a shrine resembling the one at the *sāsthra kāraya's*. A canopy made out of entwined palm leaves housed a poster with eight photos showing *prēta* and aspects of the *puja* as proof of his legitimacy. The *kattadiyā* joined us and explained that the whole clearing is a shrine to the gods [*devale*]. Lasantha explained,

> This *devale* is behind my parents' home, many times they see a light going round, purple and white colour. I never see except once I think – I don't know, maybe because I am *manusha gana*.[30]

He then added that his parents were once at home on their porch at 6.30pm, when they saw a rising light from the garden. The light rose up around 3ft and hovered, before it disappeared over the wall. I pressed him as to what he thought it might be and he said his parents were convinced it was a god coming to the *devale*.

Figure 22 The *devale* in front of the *kattadiyā's* home.

[30] *Manusha gana* refers to the temperament one has when they are born, there are three *ganas*, *manusha* being that affiliated with humans. It was explained to me that these people are endowed with fear, *baya*, and are able to see *preta* and *yakku* but not *deva*.

Figure 23 The poster with photos illustrating the *kattadiyā's* credentials – the white orbs are believed to be *prēta*.

Lasantha explained that he would have to continue helping the *kattadiyā* with the preparations for the *puja*, but before he wanted to show me something. He led me through some foliage and then through a back path into the back yard of his parents' home. He opened the door to a spare room and led me inside, pointed at the table and said:

> This all the things we need for the *bahiravā puja*. I cannot keep in the home because then Estelle want to know what we doing. Then she say, 'why you spend all this money?', but this is our belief. She make me crazy, too much Maurice, too much now.

I asked how much it all cost and he said:

> All coming over 50,000 rupees[31] – it's very expensive. *Kattadiyā* he tell all bring, must have seven coconuts, one hundred *dhehi* (lime), hair, fruit, jaggery, *bulath* (betel), many things – you see no?'

He explained that they needed to bring seven different flowers, seven different sweets, seven yams, many different type of saris of various colours and patterns, as well as sarongs, and coins of every type of metal. Then he added,

> we don't know what the *prēta* asking, if we don't have we must run and bring. Ah, and we must bring five different waters, *kattadiyā* saying very important: water from the sea, from the lake, from the river, from the tree and from the well and five different earths he bring.

Figure 24 Materials in preparation for the *bahiravā puja*.

I left Lasantha to his preparations and returned later that evening at 6pm to find his brother-in-law [*massinā*] at the gate to the land with his three-wheeler, clutching a cock with bound feet in his arms. He gave it to me and instructed me to give it to Lasantha as he had to run off and collect more

[31] Around 245GBP

items for the *puja*. Lasantha arrived a few moments later and took the cock from my arms with one hand and giggling, gestured at it with the other and said, 'maybe this one dead later'. I helped him set up plastic chairs around the perimeter of the land, as his brothers, parents, cousins, in-laws and friends filtered in. His older brother Sunil sat down next to me and quickly leaned over and said, 'Ah Maurice very long night tonight, I think we need some fuel, what you think?' He giggled and gestured to Ratnasiri, Saran's father, who let out a deep guffaw and nodded eagerly. I asked, 'But is it alright with the *puja*?' Sunil answered, 'Yes yes, this is very normal and nice for us – the wives they go home early so we can drink no problem.' I offered to bring two bottles and Sunil summoned the neighbour boy, Deepe, to take me to the bar on his motorbike. On my return, the bottles were hidden safely from the women's view and I sat next to Sunil, whilst Lasantha continued making arrangements with the *kattadiyā*. Sunil turned to me and asked, 'So you believe in these things?' I answered that I hadn't really formed an opinion yet as it was my first direct encounter, but related how some friends believed in ghosts and had claimed that relatives of theirs had experiences with hauntings. This seemed to give him satisfaction and I asked if he believed, to which he answered,

> Yes this is all very true, you remember I tell you many times when I see Sergio after tsunami? I wake up and he there looking at me on the ceiling, he trying to tell me something but cannot speak, and after that I never see him again but I can feel him.

Sergio was an Italian man who had lived in Sunil's guest house for almost five years before he died in the tsunami. Many villagers remembered him and spoke fondly of him. Sunil had discovered Sergio's body in a tangle of branches a few days after the disaster. Lasantha had come to sit down beside us, as had their younger brother Asanka. I asked Sunil if he thought many people became *prēta* when they died and Lasantha cut in and said,

> Now more people coming back as *prēta*, and because of tsunami more than before here. People have too much *thanhā* (greed), they love for the land too much, for the possessions and for the family. Many people they die in tsunami, they don't want to leave.

Sunil nodded in affirmation. Recalling a similar conversation I had with him some days before, I asked if the astral body [*mano kaya*] he had referred to then was in any way related. Sunil answered,

> No that different, *mano kaya* like a second person live inside us, it still us, but different, difficult to explain. With the *mano kaya* we can go many places and we don't even know, I can go England, sometimes when I dreaming that the *mano kaya*. Very different to *prēta*, that is us – what we do in this life, if we not happy or if we too happy with the things then very difficult to leave this world.

Protective thread [*äpa nūl*] had been wound around the perimeter of the land like a protective boundary, save for the entrance at the gate. A large table had been set in the centre of the house shell. It was covered in banana leaves and lotus leaves [*vara kola*] and lined with oil lamps, food offerings in the centre [*pideni*] and plastic cups which would be filled later with arrack and juice. Next to the table was the offering stand [*thattuva*] which had yet to be filled with *pideni*. Lasantha told me that when they had laid the foundation slab there had been problems with the alignment of the auspicious lines/points [*subha padhaya*], or with the reading of them. This had resulted in the foundation slab being laid incorrectly and was what alerted Lasantha and Hamzi to the presence of *prēta* meddling. The foundation would have to be pulled out and everything done over again after consulting Lasantha's birth chart [*janma nekkatha*] to determine the auspicious times.

Figure 25 On the table may be seen the lit oil lamps, coconut flowers, cups, seven different flowers and lime. Behind is the *thattuva* and the *äpa nūl* may be seen descending to form a boundary around the table.

Lasantha's family members began to gather around the table whilst the *kattadiyā* began to chant. Lasantha had instructed me to take as many photos of the event throughout the night as I possibly could and Indu now led me by the hand to the dark corners of the plot of land. He said that we should try and photograph near the *gewatte padhaya* (the four main points of the land), to try and catch the *prēta* in action. I followed him around the property after which we consulted the

kattadiyā on the most likely whereabouts of the *prēta.* We began photographing the land and dark patches and around trees. We then checked the photos and Indu suddenly got very excited as he pointed to a discernible white orb in the photo that he indicated was a *prēta*. As we continued the process he suddenly leapt back in horror and cried out '*muna inne*' (there's a face), at which everyone crowded around to look in awe.

Figure 26 Photo of the *prēta* with the supposed outline of a face.

Lasantha grabbed my arm in excitement and said, 'you see, you see, it's true, that the *prēta aiyo.*' The family gathered around the table and *thattuva* as the *kattadiyā's* helper began the *kiri itiravīma* (boiling of milk in a clay pot on a temporary hearth supported by three bricks), an offering to the gods [*deva*]. In the meantime, Indu continued to take me round the perimeter of the land to search for more *prēta* to photograph. I was experiencing rising excitement and some nervousness. The *kattadiyā* continued chanting *pirit* following the *kiri itiravīma*. As this long process carried on, I returned to take my seat with other family members and friends who were seated at the far end of the field. They were laughing and sharing gossip and news. Sunil was talking about their cousin Dhammika, a local fisherman who dabbled in *ganja* and had just been caught by police for the third time in recent weeks. Sunil was shaking his head and turned to me and said,

> He is very close to us, always with me and Chaminda, you know, you see. He come drinking with us many times, we like him very much. Every time I try to help, I have to tell my friends

> in the police "please can you help me this time, he is our cousin", and they help him because of me, they let him go. I give them some *arrack* and then ok no problem. You remember I ask you for that bottle last week – that for them, for helping Dhammika. They tell me he cannot do again, maybe next time they cannot help. Today they catch him again, his wife coming my house, she saying "please, please they take Dhammika to the police, you help", I tell her I cannot do anything this time. Then I look bad too, not good for me, many of these police my friends – what they think of me then? I told him last week, I told him "Dhammika, this time last time, next time I cannot help". I think now he angry with me, but cannot do anything.

Hamzi nodded in agreement as other friends and family members consoled Sunil, reassuring him that it was not his fault if he couldn't help. They assured him that they would talk to Dhammika and smooth things over.

The *puja* provided an opportunity for friends, family and other village members to collect together in a show of unity and friendship. Much like *avurrudu* (New Year's), V*esak* (Buddha's Birthday), *pōya* (full moon days), *thovil* (devil dances), and *perahära* (village festival), the *bahiravā puja* was also an occasion to demonstrate support, socialise and strengthen the bonds of friendship. In ritual events such as the *bahiravā puja*, *bali* and *thovil*, collective participation was woven into their structure. Villagers gathered at the home or land, brought gifts, socialised and shared actively in the ritual experience. Socialisation is a main part of each ritual. In both the *thovil* and the *bahiravā puja* people are brought together in support of the person or people the ritual is being performed for. Villagers spend the evening together, conquer the darkness of the night and emerge together in the light of morning when the rituals come to an end. Rituals such as the *thovil* and *bahiravā puja* are also demonstrations of kinship and the ritual process itself is an expression of a 'mutuality of being' (Sahlins 2011). In the *thovil* people gathered enact the patient's experience of physical and psychological pain. The people collected at the event then aid the patient in ridiculing the world of demons. The patient is helped to overcome their fear and the people gathered at the event help draw the patient out of that world and back into the world of humans, as one of them. In the *bahiravā puja* there is also a shared sense of belonging to a place especially when, as in the context of Po, place is in flux as a result of increased land appropriation by outsiders and the increased presence of *prēta*.

As midnight approached I had re-joined Lasantha, his wife and children near the *thattuva*. His mother had arrived to take the children home as they could not stay past midnight, it would be harmful to them according to Lasantha. He explained that it was not allowed to have young girls

past that time and they might have nightmares. They were already agitated. The *kattadiyā*'s chant had ended. Lasantha and Saran, together with the *kattadiyā* placed the *pideni* in the *thattuva* as the *kattadiyā* engaged himself in conversation with the *prēta*. He switched from Sinhala to Tamil to speaking in tongues. Lasantha nudged me and told me that this was also *āruda*. The *kattadiyā* suddenly paused and began screaming in tongues. His assistants and the villagers crowded round him and held him as he fell back. He requested another two cocks. Saran's uncle volunteered to go ask his neighbours to give him theirs and he hopped on his motorbike and sped off. Dry fish [*karavala*] was then requested and someone else rushed off to find some and bring it back. Social networks and connections were being mobilised to aid in the success of the ritual. As people sped back and forth into the night, a web of connections and links to village space were being revealed. Who could be relied on to help them? Post-tsunami recovery and development had re-distributed village and land, in contrast the *puja* allowed people to re-draw the boundaries of village space.

A hole had been dug in the ground and one of the bound cocks was placed in it. The hole was covered with planks of wood, a fibre mat and then soil – the cock served as an offering to placate the earth spirits [*bahiravā*]. The *kattadiyā* entered into a plea with the earth spirits to protect this land for him and his immediate family, calling on his *paramparava* to link him to the land. The *paramparava* represents the ancestry of Lasantha from his father's side, seven generations culminating in the *paramparava* namely: *mutta, nimutta, kitta, kirikitta, natta, panatta* and *kirikæmutta*.

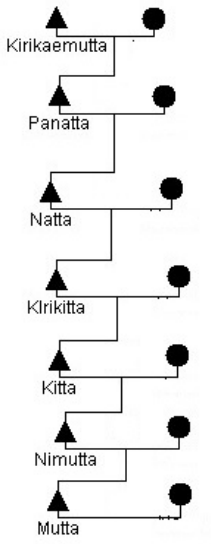

Figure 27 The ancestry [*paramparava*] of a family in Po and Thomale, made up of seven generations [*hath mutu paramparava*].

The invocation of the *paramparava* represents a linking of Lasantha to the land through his ancestry, such that the land becomes a confirmation of the hereditary link of himself and his family.

Following the burial of the cock the *kattadiyā,* as a devotee to *Kali deva,* then offers *pideni* and acts as a medium for *Kali* to talk through him. Using a knife he begins to cut his tongue to draw blood as an additional offering to *Kali*. On seeing the blood being drawn the *kattadiyā*'s assistants uttered the word 'good' [*sattayi*] and the *kattadiyā* fell onto the mat where the cock was buried. With a trident in one hand and his mouth open, he began convulsing. He motioned for the *gireya* (device for cutting areca) and performed the splitting of the limes [*dhehi käpuma*] over his head. If the split limes land face up, his assistants would say *sattayi* (truth/ good), if not *ille* (tamil for no/ negation). The *kattadiyā* repeats the process if the limes land face down. Upon getting to his feet, with fire torch [*pandama*] in hand, he moved his hand to the *thattuva* which was balanced over him as he lay on the ground. He invoked the *prēta* to leave the land and engaged in a long dialogue with them. He asked them what they wanted in return for leaving and with every new demand people scrambled off in all directions to find and bring the items requested. He then rose to his feet once the items requested had been brought back. Using the *gireya* he performed another *dhehi käpuma* first over Lasantha's head and then over Saran's head. With *pandama* and powdered tree resin [*dhummala*] in hand he invoked the *prēta* to leave the land amid a small shower of sparks and flames. The whole process was repeated numerous times with the *thattuva* being moved at intervals along the land. The *thattuva* was in this way taken across the land till the gate over a span of three hours. As all this was happening, I was summoned into the neighbouring house by the group of male friends and family to partake in the *arrack* and bites on offer.

Figure 28 The cock for the earth spirits being buried underground.

Figure 29 *Kattadiyā* cutting his tongue for *Kali deva* with his assistants in the background.

The men that were assembled in the room sat round three adjoining plastic tables. They all hailed from different ends of the village. I sat between Hamzi and Ratnasiri as they reminisced over past sightings of *prēta* to the nodding of those collected around. They drew on their memories, recalling the names of people who had died and of whom sightings as *prēta* had been reported. They talked of the character traits and habits of people before they became *prēta*, as well as the precise parts of the village with which they were most connected. Ratnasiri again mentioned the sighting he had two weeks before by his gate and Hamzi's neighbour exclaimed how he always remembered him standing there asking for a cigarette. Hamzi told me, 'we always see them same place they were before'. In their narratives Hamzi and the other men describe *prēta* as belonging to a place in life and in death attempts are made to remove them from land. In death they do not belong to world of the living, yet their presence is still preferred to some outsiders. *Prēta* can be removed from land through the ritual, outsiders cannot.

The men continued drinking and joking. After more *arrack* was consumed the conversation diverted to the tsunami and the increase in the number of *prēta* since. Sunil said:

> You know after tsunami, Chaminda and Duncan coming back down with the boat, everywhere water and bodies, they pulling many people from the trees, many women and take them inland. You know this no, Maurice? Very good for the *karma* for them, but many people they forget this, but it's no problem – then their *karma* is good. Lot of people leaving after, they don't want to stay, not good feeling, some people thinking maybe because of the dead, or scared, or for the bad memories. Many people they coming down from inland and robbing the homes and the bodies – but why these people leave? When they go somewhere else they don't know anybody. Anyhow we stay and now ok, no?

Saran's brother called us in to return to the *puja* as the *thattuva* had reached the gate. Lasantha and Saran had remained seated on the mat at the initial starting point of the *thattuva*, which is where they had to remain until the end of the *puja*. The *thattuva* was picked up and carried in front of the *kattadiyā* who walked behind holding the *pandama* in one hand and three eggs in the other. Deepe carried the bound cock in his left hand. The *kattadiyā* led us through the path and onto the road, talking to the *prēta*, telling them to leave the land. At the road he drew a line with the burnt out *pandama*, separating the entrance to the land from the rest of the road. He then made an offering of the eggs as a live sacrifice [*billa*] and smashed them to the ground. For the final time he lay on the mat which had been spread out on the ground under the *thattuva*, with the live cock under his head. The cock acted as a decoy human sacrifice [*depawila*] and he incited the *prēta* one last time to leave the land. All of a sudden he screamed and bit into the neck of the cock ripping out a chunk of flesh and effectively killing it. It was later explained to me by Lasantha, 'He must do, otherwise very dangerous for him, *prēta* going for his body after, maybe die we don't know.'

The dead cock was slumped over the *thattuva* and carried past the crossroads. A group of gathered men accompanied the *kattadiyā* and the *thattuva* through the winding village pathways and down to sea. The *thattuva* was placed on some rocks at the water's edge where the mat was draped over it and set alight amidst much swearing and cursing. After the party had watched the burning pile for a few minutes we were instructed to walk back and not to look behind us until we had passed the crossroads again. Before re-entering the land the *kattadiyā* doused each member of the party from head to foot with coconut flower [*pol mal*] and charmed turmeric water [*kaha diya*]. This he did whilst chanting the head to foot verse [*sirisapade*] to expel all malign contaminants of the process from each participant and to prevent the *prēta* re-entering land.

The conquest of place

When we returned to the land accompanied by the *kattadiyā* it was 5am and some family members and friends were beginning to make their way home. Lasantha and Saran had to remain seated on the mat till the oil lamps that adorned the perimeter had burnt out, save for the final one which then had to be taken to the local temple [*pansala*], together with a tray of *pideni* from the table, to be blessed. I was taken aside by Hamzi and invited to join him and Deepe on his back porch for a last bottle of *arrack* he had stashed away. As we sat on the porch, I asked him why there had been so many *bahiravā pujas* in recent years. He said:

> Many people dying from the tsunami, and many families they finished. You know our family nobody die, this because of *karma* – those people they die, or many from the family die, because of bad *karma*. We have much damage to our home, Lasantha full damage – all of us much damage, but we get lot of help and many foreigners they help us. First we have big problems, you know with hotel people and some others they try to cheat us and saying many many bad things, but anyhow now we good. Those people leaving the village, they bad *karma* – they sell the land and they go. Many foreigners they come and buy the land very cheap, they don't like talk to us, it's ok, but then they have many problems with the house, many *prēta* still there. They don't believe. We want to help, but they think we cheating so we say "ok you go, you do yourself", now bad *karma* going for them. Lucien he good man, we help to them and they happy, no problems – other people have problems, maybe soon they leave.

Hamzi's narrative frames the tsunami as a critical event that disordered village life by destroying property, killing and displacing people and transforming the relations around place. *Karma* is an important feature here – it is a legitimising concept in the way it is used to explain the inexplainable and to justify the unjustifiable. Why so much destruction and death? Why were some people spared and others not? Why are some people more fortunate than others? In their study of causal thinking after the tsunami in Sri Lanka, Levy et.al note that, '[f]or some individuals karma may provide comfort because it presents a world order of balance, whereas for others it may be associated with a feeling that bad fortune cannot be avoided' (Levy et.al 2009: 43). The latter is also reflected in Lasantha's frequent visits to the *sāsthra kāraya*, where he expresses concern at the condition of his *karma*. However, contrary to what Levy et.al suggest, he does not associate *karma* with 'bad fortune that cannot be avoided', but rather as the result of a constant flow of events and thoughts that impact on the present and future. Both Hamzi and Lasantha have stated that the tsunami was a

result of collective bad *karma* and those that lost their lives did so because of negative *karma*, which also explains the presence of so many *prēta* post-tsunami. Lasantha had told me, 'Many of those people who die tsunami from the village, I know they not doing good, that's why they die.' The tsunami in this way was seen as a reordering of the village community, expelling the malign people for a fresh start.

In the context of post-tsunami Sri Lanka, the increased sightings of *prēta* point to two possible explanations. The first draws on the notion that the *prēta* are representative of an over-attachment to, or desire for, worldly things, particularly land. In the case of the *bahiravā puja* land is the specific concern of the ritual, the *prēta* and the villagers. In this scenario, narratives of sightings of *prēta* increased as the number of outsiders in the village increased, particularly outsiders with a desire to acquire and develop land. Following this logic, the *bahiravā puja* and narratives of *prēta* are utilised as discursive platforms whereby villagers voice their discontent at the rapid appropriation and development of village land by outsiders. The *puja* in this sense is also a narrative of community where kinship is enacted throughout. This is evident in the mutual experience of the event, acts of reciprocity, the provision of moral support, and the collective consumption of food and alcohol. The ritual is in this way also a unique experience of place as a result of the visits by participants to different parts of the village and homes in search of items for the *puja*, as well as through the sharing of village stories and the ritualization of ownership of land. Through these acts villagers draw real and mental maps of social relations in the village.

The second explanation draws on Hamzi's comments cited at the beginning of this section, where he paints a picture of *karma* as being synonymous with the idea of community. In chapter 4 I defined community as 'a sense of belonging together' (Brow 1996: 12). Hamzi talks of people who died in the tsunami as having bad *karma* and Lasantha states that he knew that some of those who died did bad things while they were alive. Hamzi also states that those villagers who moved away from the village had bad *karma*. Indirectly, Hamzi, Lasantha and other villagers are suggesting that those who died are bad people and do not belong with them, that they are not a part of their village. Yet, when sharing stories of *prēta* sightings, villagers also talked fondly of some of the departed, remembering their traits and their interactions with them. Villagers' narratives described some *prēta* as having 'too much love' for land or human relations, whilst others were described as greedy and covetous of material things. The framing of deceased villagers as *prēta* allowed villagers to talk disparagingly about their rivals (dead or alive) in an accepted way. In doing so, some villagers focused on what they saw as negative traits in people that led to them becoming *prēta*. In the process, people who had become *prēta* were classified as morally inferior to other villagers. Lasantha and his family

members also considered that the most malign *prēta* inhabited the land of the most unwelcome outsiders. For example, the ghosts of villagers who were considered greedy were also identified as occupying outsiders' land. This could be interpreted as a comparison of the outsider's greed for land with the *prēta*'s own insatiable appetites. Thus, in the case of Lucien's land, through performing the *bahiravā puja* villagers indicate the types of relationships they want by voluntarily performing the ritual for the foreign couple.

Narratives of spirits and ghosts have been widely recorded in anthropological literature. The notion that spirits reflect both order and disorder in the real world is also not a new concept. Writing about cosmology among the Maring of Papua New Guinea, Christopher J. Healey (1988) details how 'multivocal concepts' on nature and culture dominate Maring cosmologies. The Maring, Healey argues, draw their cosmological conceptions from the human world, the animal world and the spirit world, as well as from their surroundings. Healey posits that within each of the latter groupings are co-existing representations of order and disorder. In reference to spirits in Maring culture, Healey notes,

> As inhabitants of the forest associated with animals, and as persecutors of living men, spirits exemplify the forces of nature and disorder. By participating in exchanges with men, spirits behave in an essentially cultural way. Through exchanges, or the lack of them, spirits' behaviour becomes predictable, ordered (Healey 1988: 118).

Similarly, in *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* (2008) Heonik Kwon covers a series of encounters between central Vietnamese and ghosts of war – be they Vietnamese, American or Algerian ghosts. Kwon argues that narratives of ghosts in this context reveal much about the current moral and political issues. He states that the examples and narratives he provides illustrate,

> how the social actors tell about their collective existence and personal aspirations through the actions of imaginary beings which are considered, in conventional social theory, conceptually outside the domain of social order and therefore outside the sphere of sociological inquiry (Kwon 2008: 3).

Kwon draws on George Simmel's notion of the stranger to illustrate that ghosts in Vietnam are 'ideologically outside a given social order but they are existentially close to the social process within the order' (Kwon 2008: 23). In the context of *prēta* sightings in post tsunami Sri Lanka spirits represent an unwelcome intrusion into villagers' lives; they do not own land but lay claim to it. On the other hand, they represent a link with the past and villagers' imaginaries of that past life. The major changes in the village as a result of the tsunami disaster are reflected in this way, in the moral

and socio-political concerns of post-tsunami village Sri Lanka. The moral and socio-political concerns of Po villagers in this case revolve around rightful ownership of land and legitimacy in their own village. *Prēta* who are talked of fondly represent people who belonged to the community, whereas those described as greedy and difficult to remove were associated with the greedy and unwelcome outsider. In a similar vein, Marja Tiilikainen (2010) reveals that spirit possession in Northern Somalia increased after the start of the civil war. She notes that, 'Images of *jinn* are malleable and draw on contemporary life and politics – *jinn* may be compared to electricity or the internet, and even Jewish *jinn* sometimes appear' (Tiilikainen 2010: 178-179). She explains that Jewish *jinn* are considered 'worst of all', reflecting the anti-Semitic feeling common among Somalis.

At the *bahiravā puja* men discussed the identities of the *prēta* and drew their descriptions from collective memory and local knowledge. This act in itself is a separation of insiders from outsiders where only insiders have access to these memories. Hamzi, Lasantha and numerous other villagers have expressed resentment at the lack of interaction between the outsiders and villagers. Village space has been colonised and transformed. Outsiders' properties (both foreigners and wealthy Sinhalese) have high concrete walls erected around to keep the villagers out. Through the narrative of the *prēta* villagers invade the enclosed walls of outsider-owned properties and question their ownership of the land. *Prēta* have a shared history with villagers and link with the land and are alive in the memories of those they have left behind and continue to torment. Outsider-owned land is thus not considered by villagers to belong to the new owners. Sunil explained to me that even should they decide to hold the *puja*, they have no links within the community to aid in the ritual. This in itself highlights the co-operation and sociality at the heart of the ritual.

In this chapter I have shown how narratives of and encounters with *prēta* exemplify local discourses of land, loss and community following the tsunami. In particular, the *bahiravā puja* draws on local notions of community to determine who belongs and who doesn't. Recollections of past people and places by villagers in the ritual may be seen as an expression of desired relationships. As Jon Mitchell (1997) aptly notes:

> Rather than a kind of 'filling' for the containers of our minds, memory is an engagement with the world around us, in which experience is perceived, interpreted, and accommodated in a continual process (1997:80).

In the next chapter I look at the body as a tool for voicing personal, as well as social tensions and dissension, using two case studies. In the first section I expose aspects of the political nature of ritual with reference to a *thovil* in Thomale. The *thovil* in this case reveals the types of social

relations and related tensions that exist between some villagers in Po and Thomale. In the second section, I provide case studies of suicide and self-harm to illustrate how individual pain in these cases is reflective of domestic tensions. How do individuals communicate distress? And how do people closest to the victim respond to different displays of distress/pain?

Chapter 8 – People and pain

In late September 2012 I was jolted awake by a series of loud thumps at my door, accompanied by my name being howled in short quick bursts. This was Toni's trademark visit announcement, a racket that could be heard throughout the street, alerting all to the activity at my door. Toni had inherited a condition of partial deafness from over three decades of excessive alcohol consumption. He often complained of aches that would lead him in search of his 'medicine' which happened to be a quart of *arrack*. A contribution of money to purchase *arrack* was what had brought him to my house that morning in September. His sister, Gunangi, had warned me not to give Toni any drink, but village friends had suggested I donate some money from time to time. It was explained to me that if he had money he would be more inclined to buy *arrack*, rather than purchasing the cheaper and more harmful *kasippu*, a form of illicitly brewed moonshine.

I opened the door and Toni pushed past me carrying a plastic bag of fish – currency for the anticipated donation – and climbed the few steps leading up to the main house and I followed. He sat himself at my plastic table, carelessly handed me the bag of fish, rested his hands on his lap and stared expectantly at me. I fingered my pocket for some money and gave it to him, after which I brought out a small glass and poured him a shot of *arrack*. He grinned, cupped his hand around my ear and yelled, 'Podi hospital *inne*' (Podi's in hospital). I asked why, to which he answered that Podi had been drinking too much. He raised his hands in consternation, tapped the side of his head with his index finger and said, '*sihiya näthuwa'* then added in English, 'Memory upset'.

Podi is a close friend of Toni and is well known among villagers in both Po and Thomale. He is an avid drinker in his mid-thirties, who sometimes worked as a fisherman on a shared catamaran, taking a percentage of the sale of the catch. He worked till he earned enough money for drink. Once his money ran out he returned to fishing for a short period of time and repeated the process. He lives with his parents, aunt and older sister. Many of his relatives live and work in Cyprus and Podi's parents receive remittances on a monthly to bi-monthly basis. He is therefore covered in his living expenses and works only to supplement his lifestyle as a carefree bachelor. He has known Toni all his life and they quickly became drinking partners. Podi acted as Toni's right hand man when Toni was the village big man, before he succumbed to the effects of his drinking habit.

In previous chapters I explained how Toni's alcoholism resulted in a reduction in his influence in the area. Toni's loss of power also affected Podi's social position and influence, which Podi believed was attached to Toni's status. Podi's drinking increased drastically in the months following Toni's loss of standing. Lasantha noted in early 2012, 'Before, they always together, you see Podi, and Toni there

too. Now Toni finished, soon I think also Podi finished.' Podi and Toni remained close friends and would still often drink together. However, Toni's reduced influence in Po had limited the number of social events Toni was invited to and as a result Podi was also being excluded from invitations. *Sihiya näthuwa*, to be not in one's right mind, is used as a general term that refers to either having a troubled mind as a result of depression or extreme worry, or being wholly intoxicated and unaware of one's actions. Michelle Ruth Gamburd (2008) explains this term as one that '[e]ntails a complex attribution of relational selfhood and agency' (Gamburd 2008: 51). Gamburd goes on to add, '[t]he concept of *sihiya nætuwa* thus includes absentmindedness and preoccupation, both states in which one becomes heedless of ordinary social responsibilities' (Gamburd 2008: 52). Podi had always drunk alcohol on a regular basis, but now his habit had reached new excesses, such that Lasantha had described meeting a heavily intoxicated Podi at the *karom*[32] club on two occasions. On both occasions, Lasantha had just returned from Colombo. He had pulled into the club with his van for a few quick drinks before heading home to his wife. He described how on both these occasions that took place in the space of one week, he had met Podi and had a few drinks with him. When he ran into Podi a few days later, Podi did not remember meeting him and in fact had thought that they hadn't met in a long time. Lasantha said, 'He forget all – memory upset. Then I worry because he not like that before, I think maybe he have some problems.' He explained 'memory upset' as signifying that he was *sihiya näthuwa*, and added 'something wrong with the mind, like a different person.' These excerpts established a precedent for Podi's visit to the hospital and for a collectively acknowledged problem afflicting him. To combine Gamburd's (2008) definition of *sihiya näthuwa* with Lasantha's explanation, it transpired, that Podi was experiencing a crisis of the self; a situation that I go on to explain in more detail.

In this chapter, I take a closer look at two different ways of coping with social pressures involving: an exorcism or devil-dance [*thovil*] and self-harm. In the aftermath of a disaster, the enormous social upheavals that result can take their toll on the physical, psychological and social well-being of individuals (Benthall 1993; Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002; Jimenez 2008; Nordstrom 2004; Simpson 2013). In the contexts I describe here I am concerned with how individual distress is communicated to the rest of the community and how conversely, the community responds to different manifestations of distress. In doing so I am also concerned with unveiling the events that lead up to such public manifestations of distress, for what they may tell us about the everyday lives and coping mechanisms of individuals in these two communities. How are pain and shame experienced and communicated?

[32] A popular local game played between men, and especially youths, often whilst drinking.

Bruce Kapferer (1997), writing about exorcism in southern Sri Lanka notes that, '[h]uman beings are conscious beings by virtue of their embodied existence in a life world' (Kapferer 1997: 222). In other words, consciousness is not an individual affair, but is constituted by rules and structures woven together by the interaction of people with one another and the environments they live in. Departure from this world either through death, or through possession is in itself a discourse of community, in the ways that people attempt to give meaning to a world beyond their grasp. In this way, people's deliberations on the worlds of death, demons and gods act as a narrative of the human world. In the previous chapter I illustrated how the *bahiravā puja* enabled narratives of community and place to be rehearsed. In the next section, I continue along this line of argument and illustrate how the *thovil* brings out narratives of community and self. I further illustrate how the *thovil* represents a transgression of the boundaries between two worlds, that of demons and humans. In doing so the ritual exposes a number of dualities, between individual and community and, shame/ridicule and power.

A *thovil* in Thomale

A number of works have been written and detailed analyses provided on the Sinhalese *thovil* (Argenti-Pillen 2010; Kapferer 1983 and 1997; Simpson 1984; Vogt 1999; Wirz 1954), that have dealt with ritualistic structure, healing practices and cosmological re-ordering as aspects at the centre of the *thovil* ritual. The *thovil* is a public healing ritual for a patient possessed by a demon [*yakka*] – an ailment that manifests itself as a detachment of the self from worldly events and an inability to function properly in an everyday social context. The patient's being is thus one of disorder and the exorcism is a process whereby, 'the demonic becom[es] progressively tamed and subordinated within encompassing and unifying totalizing orders commanded by the Buddha and the major Sinhalese deities' (Kapferer 1997: xiv). In the following account I provide only cursory details of the ritual and I focus more on the accompanying narratives and events that give substance to the exorcism. In particular I provide a commentary as to why the *thovil* was significant in Podi's case and how it ran parallel with a critical stage in his life and reflected the uncertainty of his social position and his social relations. I argue that the notion of *sihiya näthuwa* is a reflection of the culmination of this disordered state, a physical/psychological ailment that is reflective of a more ingrained social ailment: the loss of prestige [*nambuva*] and status [*thathvaya*].

A week after Toni's visit to my home in which he revealed the details of Podi's condition, he visited me again with news and an invitation to Podi's *thovil,* which would be taking place two days later.

Podi had just returned from the hospital, after six days internment there, and was then at home where his family were taking care of arrangements for the *thovil*. The doctors had said that his condition was due to over-consumption of alcohol (I was later told that apart from a general absence of consciousness, he also had blood in his stool and saliva), but a visit to the *sāsthra kāraya* had indicated other causes and the need for a *thovil.* Following a visit to the exorcist [*gurunānsē*] for confirmation that he was indeed possessed by *Mahasona*, the great cemetery demon, preparations for the *thovil* were under way. Toni informed me he would come by my home to pick me up at nine in the morning on the day of the *thovil* and advised me to make a trip to Po in the meantime to inform Lasantha and his family of the *thovil* and to remind them to be there. I accompanied him to the door, and he again spoke to me in earnest to make sure I reminded Lasantha and his family to be present.

Later that afternoon I made my way to Lasantha's home and relayed the message. He nodded somewhat absent-mindedly and we sat down to some milk tea. 'So Podi left the hospital? You see him?' he asked. I confirmed that he had in fact left, but that I hadn't seen him yet. He nodded pensively, then added 'If Saran let me go, then I come, but maybe she won't let me go – she know if I go, then I drink and she don't like I drink in Thomale'. We indulged in some idle chit chat after which I rode up to his father's home. Hamzi invited me in for a cup of tea and I sat at the table and told him what I had just told Lasantha. Hamzi nodded and said, 'I like Podi very much, yes you tell them I come'. A short while later Asanka popped out of his room and made his way over to greet me. Hamzi told him about Podi's *thovil* to which he responded, 'Ah, I don't like this fucking shit, but Podi's our friend. I will try my best eh. But anyway you are going no? You are like our family, so you go, it's the same we go'. He smiled and Hamzi laughed at this. It made me uneasy and I wasn't sure whether he was pulling my leg or simply being sarcastic. He then added, 'But don't go alone, many fishermen there and lot of drinking. Who is coming with you?' I answered that I would be joining Toni and Subha, my neighbour who was also Toni's uncle. He shook his head in approval then added, 'Suranga will be there sure, I will tell him to look for you'.

On the day of the *thovil,* Toni, true to his word, passed by my home a little before 9am. He pushed his way past me and sat down at the table. He looked at me with that now familiar and expectant gaze. I pulled out a bottle of *arrack* and poured him a drink. He knocked back the alcohol and told me we would need 1,000 rupees for a donation to the family from both of us and a further 1,500 rupees for two bottles of *arrack* for later. We left the house and made our way next door to Subha's. As we sat down to some tea I asked them why we needed two bottles of *arrack*, to which

Subha answered, 'Everybody know you friendly with Lasantha and Sunil, some people don't like. You bring *arrack* then no problem.'

It was 11am by the time we arrived at Podi's house. The area outside the house had been cleared and a mattress lay on the ground with Podi seated on top of it, his back against the wall. Along the perimeter of the clearing were a number of chairs on which family members were seated, opposite them the *gurunānsē* and his group were seated. A crowd of friends, neighbours and relatives were collected at the West end of the clearing by the main gate. At an angle between the patient and the exorcists was an offering stand [*thattuva*] containing food offerings [*dola-pideni*], a straw doll effigy [*pambayā*] and across from the *thattuva* was a clay pot of burning incense [*saňdun*]. This mid-day part of the ritual is known as the *Iramudun Samayama*[33] (see Kapferer 1983: 180-187) and is a *thovil* for the demon *Riri Yaka* (Blood demon), which is usually performed in conjunction with a *thovil* for another demon (the *Iramudun Samayama* is the only one that takes place during the day), in this case the *Mahasona Samayama*. Bob Simpson (1984) states,

> In an exorcism ceremony proper, the patient is believed to be affected directly by the excessive attentions of particular demons. The demonic gaze (bälma) falls onto a person causing him or her to become infused with the essence of the demon (diṣṭi). It is these effects, manifest in illness and mental disturbance, which have to be magically removed from the body of the patient through exorcism (Simpson 1984: 283).

It was explained to me that the presence of blood in Podi's stool and saliva was what had prompted the need for the *Iramudun Samayama*. Blood is the essence of the blood demon, *Riri Yaka*.

Toni led me up to the mattress at which Podi caught sight of me and grabbed my arm in his hands. He asked me where Lasantha and his brothers were and whether they were coming. I told him I had informed them and would check with them again. He stared at me anxiously for a while before letting go of my arm. This is an unusual reaction for a patient under the effects of the demonic gaze, who is reportedly filled with fear and unable to distinguish between the world of people and that of demons.

Around the centre of the clearing were various offering baskets, containing flowers [*malak*], food [*dola-pideni*], and burning incense [*saňdun*] placed on either side of a funeral pyre [*purale*] made out of banana plants and areca leaves. Following a series of short dances and chants by the *gurunānsē*, one of the exorcists entered the *purale* and had a red cloth draped over him. This is the *mala därahäva* (a part of the ritual were the exorcist lies in a funeral pyre mimicking death). The exorcist

[33] *Iramudun* meaning mid-day

began praying to Buddha, whilst a helper at the side burned the *saňdun* in a mortar and wailed '*amma, enne amma*' (mother, come to me mother), imitating the cries of a dying man to fool the demon into coming. At a quarter to mid-day one of the dancers emerged as the masked embodiment of the demon, twirling to the beat of the drums. Every so often in the height of possession, he fell backwards onto the ground, at points banging his body quite hard against the earth, or anything that happened to be in the way. People closest to him then grabbed him and hauled him up.

Figure 30 The exorcist on the ground as the masked embodiment of the demon.

At mid-day the exorcist suddenly let out a piercing shriek and darted through the crowd, sprinted out the gate and down the path, with all present in quick pursuit behind him. He ran to the crossroads, to the *purale* which had been erected there. The *purale* here is a structure made out of twined branches and leaves (areca) elevated on stilts, resembling a funeral pyre. The exorcist began tugging wildly at the *purale* until he had pulled it to the ground, then ripped off his mask and the top part of his ceremonial dress and collapsed backwards onto a mat in a daze, seemingly unawares of his whereabouts. The rest of the group piled the *thattuva* and offering baskets on the broken *purale* and set fire to the pile and with that the *Iramudun Samayama* was at an end.

Figure 31 The exorcist shoots off the ground and begins his sprint to the *purale*.

Figure 32 The exorcist in a daze on the mat after having torn down the *purale.*

Toni advised me to return to Lasantha's and remind him and his brothers to attend the main event, the *Mahasona Samayama,* later that evening. He also instructed me to pick him up from the market and take him to my house in Thomale on my return. Both Toni and Podi were anxious that Lasantha and his brothers make an appearance. The *thovil* is, as stated earlier, a public healing ritual (Vogt

1999); it gathers family, friends and allies. In this way the *thovil* maps out the network of social relations and provides an indication of the patient's social standing and status [*thathvaya*]. At stake is the well-being of a member of the community and in this context, the ritual serves as a manifestation of the status and power of the patient and his/her household in their ability to bring large numbers of people to actively participate in the event. Bruce Kapferer notes the latter with reference to the *Suniyama* (an anti-sorcery rite). Kapferer explains that participants go to the event to be seen as much as to see and the interactions between hosts and guests are continuous acts of reciprocity that indicate membership of a group or community. Kapferer notes that,

> Such reciprocity expresses a total world of power and status, of dominant and encompassing cosmic forces that define and include the striations of power and status in the mundane realities of local communities (Kapferer 1997: 130).

Toni's fall from power the previous year as a consequence of alcoholism, resulted in his maternal cousin Suranji taking over as the big man in Thomale, leading to Podi's perceived social marginalisation. Podi's excessive drinking led to loss of memory, as evidenced by his having forgotten meeting Lasantha at the *karom* club. His condition was seen as an inability to retain a grip on consciousness, a condition that parallels possession by *Mahasona*, an excess in the bodily humor of wind [*vata*], whilst *Riri Yaka* affects an excess in the bodily humor of blood/ bile [*pitta*][34] (cf. Kapferer 1983 and 1997; Simpson 1984). *Sihiya näthuwa* is understood as absent-mindedness and a lack of social functionality, but may also be seen as working in reverse. In this case, Podi's diminished social purpose and his descent from being the big man's right hand man to being just another man, affected his physical and social well-being. *Sihiya näthuwa* may thus serve as a metaphor for Podi's absence from Po social life as a result of reduced *nambuva* and *thathvaya* (prestige and status). His anxiety arising from Lasantha and Sunil's possible absence from the *thovil* is indicative of the latter. Their absence in this case confirms that they are no longer engaged in reciprocal relations with Podi. The blood in Podi's stool and saliva was interpreted (cf. Kapferer 1997: 42-43), as an indication of the blood demon *Riri Yaka*.

Following the *Iramudun Samayama* I returned to Po to remind Lasantha and his brothers of the upcoming *thovil*. Lasantha and Sunil told me to assure Podi that they would be there, whilst Asanka was nowhere to be found. I returned to Thomale, met with Toni, and we made our way to Subha's home. We were joined by a group of five other fishermen. It was mid-afternoon and the drinking had already commenced. I was asked repeatedly to confirm whether Lasantha and his family would be attending. Each time I confirmed, there were repeated affirmations from those present that it

[34] There are three bodily humors affected by demons; wind [*vata*], blood/bile [*pitta*] and phlegm [*sema*].

would be good for Podi to see them. The cause of Podi's state of mind, it seemed, had been commonly acknowledged as being at least in part caused by emotions stirred by his altered status and relations with key persons in Po. The *thovil* in this sense is a ritual of re-socialisation and as Victor Turner (1983) notes in his foreword to Kapferer's *A Celebration of Demons*,

> there are many cultural "kinds" of demons – and hence many modes of withdrawal from participation in the social fields and networks of Sri Lankan cultural existence,

and,

> individual human beings construe their pathways through life […] in terms of adjusting to a series of bodily conditions, perceptions of objects, encultured images, and learned behaviour **vis-à-vis** subjectively important others, beginning with members of one's own family (Turner in Kapferer 1983: xii).

Much of what I have argued and presented throughout this thesis has focused on the establishment and maintenance of social relations in the aftermath of the tsunami. In each chapter the narratives I have presented also indicate villagers' desired relations, which are based on a 'mutuality of being' and/or a mutuality of interest. In the following section I illustrate the extent to which people gathered at the *thovil* express the latter characteristics and how the ritual serves as a narrative of community.

The *Mahasona Samayama*

The *Mahasona Samayama* is divided into three main parts. The first phase, the evening watch, begins at 6pm and lasts until 9.30pm. During this phase it is understood that there is a conflict between the reality perceived by the audience and that perceived by the patient. The patient is caught in the world of demons, a world of fear and uncertainty. The second phase, the midnight watch, begins at 10pm and lasts until 2am and is marked by an initial part in which both patient and audience are engrossed in the world of the demonic, enhanced by the ominous rhythmic drum beat and dance. The second part of this phase is characterised by comedy, in which the demonic world is ridiculed and shown to be pathetic – it marks the drawing out of the patient from the demonic reality. The third phase, the morning watch, lasts from 3am till 6am. In this final phase the exorcist and gathered crowd draw the patient back into the human world. The audience actively participate and illustrate to the patient that he is one of them and has nothing to do with the demonic world

(Kapferer 1983; Simpson 1984; Vogt 1999). The entire ritual is structured around order, where *Mahasona* is pictured as the agent of disorder and the *gurunānsē* is recreating the order of the world, appealing to the Buddha, the deities, spirits, demons, and the audience. The exorcist outlines the boundaries between the worlds of humans, deities and demons. For Podi it also clarifies who is part of his social network, an aspect of the possession clearly alluded to by Kapferer. 'Exorcist diagnosis in itself can facilitate the construction of a patient's illness as a metaphor and a symbol of wider social problems extending around a patient' (Kapferer 1983: 62). The absence of persons at a *thovil* is quickly noticed and widely talked about and a worthy excuse must be provided. If not, villagers spend days after the event deliberating on the reasons for the absence and any feuds that may be the cause.

Toni and Subha led me to the clearing in front of Podi's house at 10pm, at a point when there was a lull in the activity between the evening watch and the midnight watch. Podi grabbed my hands and asked me about the whereabouts of Lasantha and his brothers, to which I responded that they may be around somewhere. There was a throng of people beginning to crowd around the clearing, and as Toni led me out the main gate it was clear that groups of men were drinking copious amounts in nearby gardens and houses. I was led to the main room in a nearby house, from where the thumps of the demonic drums were still discernible and we sat with a group of three other local men around a small plastic table. One of them looked at me and asked with a grimace, 'Sunil *yaluwa? Sunil inne?*' (Sunil's friend? Is Sunil here?) I answered in the negative, as Toni produced the two bottles I had donated earlier. The man, Chaminda, a local fish seller I had seen on occasion, shot a glance at the bottle and smiled and whispered to Subha. Subha let out a guffaw and said to the amusement of all present, 'he say – Sunil forget us, and with this we forget Sunil', (tapping the *arrack* bottle) then added 'they say they come, but no coming. Only talk', to which Toni added '*dos*'.[35] As the night progressed, groups of men walked into the house at intervals to partake in a quick drink and to share a few words. In the background the sound of shrieking, drum thumps, laughter and howls echoed through the night air. I was introduced to each person that entered the house, whilst Toni or Subha explained who I was, where I lived and how I knew them. I was treated to pats on the back and given directions to each individual's house coupled with invitations. We then proceeded to visit another three houses, repeating the process, wriggling through the crowd and stopping for more introductions and pats on the back. It was as much a networking ritual, as it was a healing one.

[35] I was told that *dos* meant unreliability, somebody who has a character flaw – although Simpson describes it as "fault, flaw, defect, blemish or disease", it may also be used as 'malign intentions' (Simpson 1984: 70). Other villagers have also utilised the term to mean flaw or defect, which has led me to believe that its association with unreliability may be a local idiomatic expression.

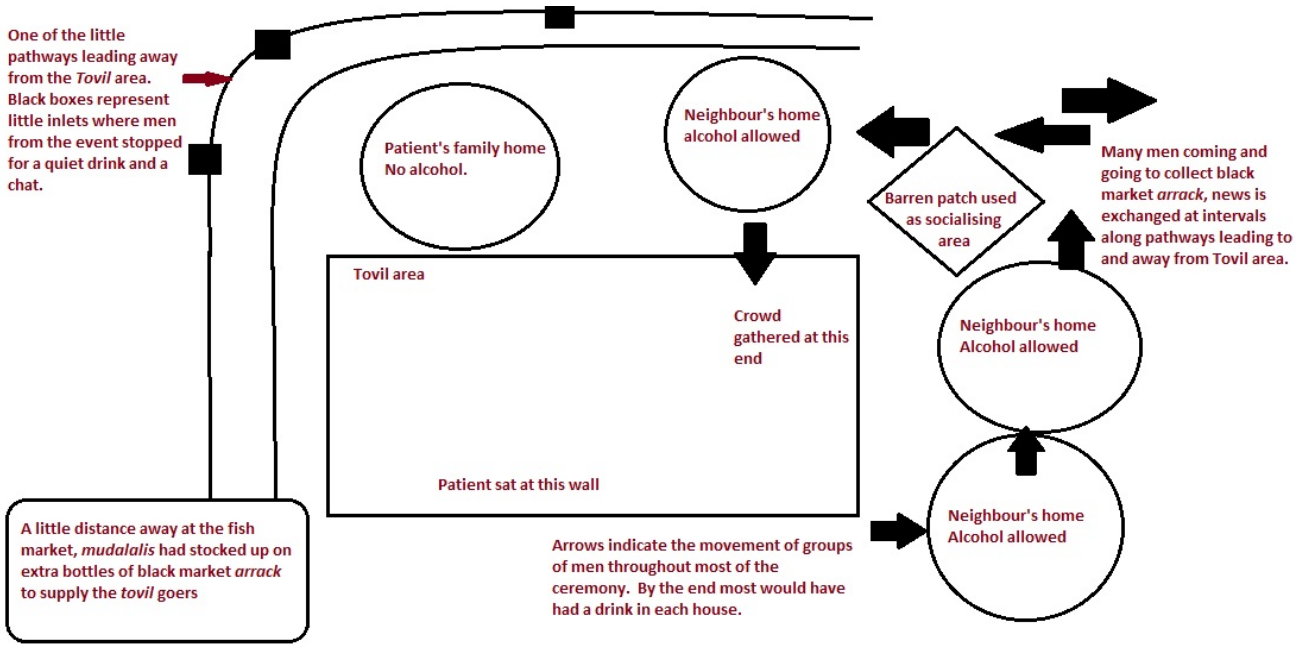

Figure 33 Map of the *thovil* area and the activities taking place around.

As the morning watch began, Toni led me back to the clearing along with most of the men that had been drinking, indicating that this was for them a significant part of the ritual. There, the exorcist as the masked embodiment of *Mahasona* had emerged and was twirling around the clearing, as all present broke into shrieks and engaged in laughter and jeering, aided to no small extent by the alcohol consumed.

The morning watch represents that part of the *thovil* where all present come together, including the patient, in the ridicule of the demonic. Kapferer notes that,

> [t]he demonic is in those political and social orders which appear to constrain and restrict the actions of men and women in their daily lives. It is in falsity and illusion. The demonic is present in the actions of those who appear to be other than they actually are (Kapferer 1983: 228).

In this context, what is also being ridiculed it seems, is the perceived source of Podi's woes – his alienation from key people in his Po social network. In doing so, the people gathered at the *thovil* demonstrate to Podi that he is already part of a tightly-knit social group and this is evident in Chaminda's earlier assertion that they will drink and forget Sunil in the same way that he has forgotten them. In the beginning of this chapter, *sihiya näthuwa* was identified as a manifestation of the cause leading up to Podi's *thovil*. His inability to carry out his normal social functions was attributed to possession by a demon. Here, the demonic is associated to Podi's social network in Po

and their inability to meet their obligations of friendship and kinship by attending the ritual. This is exemplified by Subha's reference to Sunil's unreliability and Toni's use of *dos*.

In this section I have shown how the *thovil* acts as a public ritual that brings about a form of community therapy (Vogt 1999), reinforcing social relations and revealing the strength of those relations. The distress in Podi's life, a crisis of self, is quelled by a public revelation that Podi does have a shared sense of belonging to others. The latter is an expression of community, and through the ritual community members establish who belongs and also, who doesn't. This is achieved through a collective ridiculing of a source of the problem cast in the idiom as demonic possession. In the next section I utilise a case study on suicide and a case study on self-harm to illustrate how individual distress and the absence of an avenue for voicing that distress may lead to acts of self-harm. My concern here is to illustrate how such acts reveal domestic problems and specifically, of family pressures. As a result, what do these actions tell us about kinship, family and community?

Suicide and self-harm in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has recorded some of the highest rates of suicide and self-harm globally, reaching a peak high in 1995 with a rate of 48 deaths per 100,000 (Marecek 2006). The contexts and situations that lead to the contemplation and the carrying out of acts of suicide and self-harm have been widely discussed and contested. It has been recognised that for the large part suicides in Sri Lanka are motivated by internal family disputes (De Alwis 2012; Marecek 2006; Spencer 1990a; Widger 2012). At the root of these acts are honour contestations and protests at injustices committed by family members against the victim, that result in the transfer of shame [*lajjawa*] and vulnerability from the victim to the immediate family. Acts of suicide and self-harm in this context point to a lack of domestic unity and fractured relations between family members. Families are generally regarded as the basic political units in southern Sri Lanka and family members are expected to uphold the moral integrity of the family. What I mean by moral integrity in this context is the avoidance of actions that invite shame [*lajjawa*] and that result in a loss of prestige [*nambuva*]. The latter implies keeping domestic disputes out of the public eye.

In the following sections I draw on a case study from earlier fieldwork in southern Sri Lanka, involving the double train suicide of a young couple and their unborn child. The case is still a significant one in that it is still talked about in the area and was retold to me in greater detail in mid-

2012. The case clearly illustrates how premeditated suicides are utilised as a way of publicly protesting an injustice, through the utilisation of the body as a performative and discursive medium. As a second case study I take a more recent episode dating back to late 2012. The case study describes an act of self-harm by means of ingestion of agrochemicals, where the intent is not to die but to impart a message, that is, to initiate a discourse using the body.

I argue here that tense domestic relations, as well as lack of independence and opportunities for self-determination, have resulted in youths, young men and women utilising suicide as a tool to publicly challenge a restrictive family hierarchy and difficult domestic relations. The result is a transfer of vulnerability from the victim to close kin in the case of suicide and, the restoration of autonomy for the victim in the case of self-harm. I also draw a distinction between premeditated suicide and self-harm. Premeditated suicide is finite, there is no going back and the act reflects the state of the relations between the victim/s and the family member/s it targets, that is, the relationship is broken and there is no way to make amends. The suicide victim is an abject (Simpson and Sariola 2013) and in committing suicide, also renders the family members they target as abjects in the eyes of the community. On the other hand, self-harm especially as a result of sudden anger, '*ikman kopeya'* (Widger 2012), reflects anger or frustration and a desire to change a relationship or communicate distress or pain. The intention in this case is not to die but to impart a message.

Case study One: A double train suicide

In 2005 in the village of Madagama, a village neighbouring Po, a teenage couple committed suicide by jumping in front of a train. Their families hailed from different localities, 6km apart. A friend from the village of Madagama recounted the story of the suicide – I was discouraged from approaching the immediate family for fear that this would awaken too many bad memories. What follows is the story as my friend, Gamini, explained it to me.

The girl was fifteen and three months pregnant and fearing news of the pregnancy would soon emerge, the couple decided to tell the girl's parents. Her parents were furious not only because of the pregnancy, but also because they disapproved of the union. They wanted nothing more to do with her and cast her out of their house. She met up with her boyfriend and explained what had happened. They decided to approach his parents instead. His father was frequently drunk and would often fly into a rage when intoxicated and sometimes beat the mother. The young man told his girlfriend to wait for him at the end of the path whilst he approached his mother alone. His

father had been drinking and was out the back end of the house at the time. His mother was scared of approaching the father with the news and told her son that there was nothing she could do and that they couldn't stay there.

Dismayed, the young man broke the news to his girlfriend and, having nowhere else to go, they headed up the hill to the patch of barren land by the temple. They sat and talked for hours about their situation and their possibilities; they sat all night and into the early hours of the morning and could not see any positive end to their situation. I asked my friend how he knew this and he told me that neighbours had seen them sitting by the temple – and there was much regret that none had ventured to approach them. In the early morning they made their way to the train tracks and sat down waiting for the 7.15am train. Some of the villagers were informed of the incident and made their way to the tracks to find the dead bodies of the couple, ripped apart from the waist down.

The villagers collected the bodies. When the boy's father was informed of the situation he was distraught and confronted the mother. When she admitted her part in the story, he flew into a rage with her and broke down crying. The girl's parents wanted to take her body but the boy's father refused and got very angry with them; he said he wanted to conduct the funeral service with both bodies there. Other villagers prevented the girl's parents from taking the body away, pointing out that they were a responsible party in the dramatic event and that they could have helped prevent this situation from taking place. In casting her out the parents had, in the villagers' eyes, rescinded any claims to her body and its fate.

Villagers were in turn angry with the boy's mother. They said it was her fear that caused the couple to die; she was responsible above all others. Gamini related how he and other villagers felt sympathy for the father for what he had to go through, but not for the mother. If the mother was fearful of what the father might have said or done in that state, he said, she should have sent them to her parents' home or to other relatives for a couple of days, not cast them out. According to villagers this was a premeditated suicide. The couple had exhausted all possibilities and, bereft of the protection and support of their immediate families, their only option in their minds was suicide.

Care was taken by the young couple to keep the pregnancy a secret and only immediate family were approached (in this case the parents) – indicating a reluctance to expose domestic and private affairs to the public. It might be deduced that this caution was an attempt at the time to retain the moral integrity of the family. In the case of a train suicide there is no doubt about the outcome of the attempt, unlike with ingestion of poison. The result is finite and has the added effect of exposing family affairs in a very public and gruesome fashion. The lack of options available for the couple and

the complete breakdown of communication with their families, may have been interpreted by them as an end to that relationship. As I have indicated elsewhere (Said 2014), where in life the couple's union was rejected, in death it had to be collectively accepted in the way their bodies became intertwined in one indistinguishable mass. Thus, the method of suicide serves as a metaphor for the inseparability of their bodily matter and their fates, further emphasised by the knowledge of the pregnancy. They would be united in death, whereas their families would be left with nothing but the shame and guilt of the severed union with their children.

Natalia Linos (2010) notes that suicide may become a way of reclaiming the violated body and, rather than being an act of self-destruction, it can be an act of 'construction' (Linos 2010: 8). In this case the couple having been cast away have been rendered abjects. They are burdened by the prospective humiliation of being young unmarried parents with no family and financial support. The pregnancy in this context is interpreted by the girl's parents as a violation of the body, a body that is essentially affiliated with them and that falls under their protection and in this situation that protection is denied. The self-destruction of the couple's bodies and that of their unborn child initiates a public discourse on family relations. The suicide is an example of what could be seen as a form of *body politics*, in which control over the body is being contested and who has the right to dictate how one's body is used. In the beginning of this chapter, I showed how the *thovil* served to bring Podi back into the community and restore his sense of belonging. Similarly, after having been alienated by their families and rendered abject – through their choice of suicide – the young couple's bodies were reclaimed by their community and the situation was reversed whereby their parents were rendered abject and rejected by the community they had once formed part of.

The suicide exposed the vulnerability of the families involved: the inability of the boy's father to maintain control of his drinking habit, the fear of the mother and the inability of the girls' parents to control the sexuality of their daughter. The suicide may thus be seen as a form of agency in that it exposed the couple's families to shame, challenging their moral integrity and in the process exposing their private affairs. Natalia Linos (2010) states that, '[v]iolence and biopower can then simultaneously act both to regulate the social body and to sculpt the individual body' (Linos 2010: 9). Linos is here arguing that when severe structural or political violence threatens the integrity of the body or one's identity, the body can be reclaimed through acts of self-directed violence. In particular, Linos draws on the example of Palestinian suicide bombers who, faced by the threat posed by the Israeli state, choose to destroy themselves. In the case of the young couple, the threat of being left to fend for themselves with no resources, as well as their parents' attempts to control their life decisions, led to their suicide. As a result, the couple's parents were alienated by their

communities in the same way they had alienated their children and, to add insult to injury, the union the girl's parents so disapproved of was further cemented through the inseparable mixing of her blood and bodily fluids with that of her boyfriend's, in death.

Case Study Two: Poisonous relationships

When he was in his late twenties Sunil married Gunangi, a woman from the neighbouring fishing village of Thomale. She was part of a large fishing family. Sunil told me that as soon as they were married she changed. He said, 'she had a lot of *irisiyāva* (jealousy)' and added that she had caused him a lot of problems with friends and neighbours. Sunil described how even at their wedding, Gunangi caught sight of him dancing with his cousin. Gunangi dragged Sunil angrily away from the main clearing at the wedding, in clear view of all his relatives, and with that the wedding celebrations were over. He told me, 'After I married she started to control everything and she fought with everyone – she is from a fishing family no?' I was at his home sharing a beer with him and his wife was nowhere to be seen. I had known Sunil for over six years when we were having this conversation and I was already surprised by what he told me. Sunil and his wife had always seemed to me like a jolly and loving couple. He turned to me after taking a long sip of beer and continued,

> I cannot stand her. We don't even sleep in the same room anymore – only you and my brother, and another close friend know this – it is a play eh - when people come we smile, when they go we don't even talk to each other.

He fiddled with the bottle for a while then took another sip.

> For the first few years, every time I go and drink, she get very angry, shouting at me, then she call her brother (Toni) – and he would come with friends and beat me till I go home. I was very unhappy, I cannot do anything. Before I had many friends, everyone want to drink with me, but she didn't like that so she stopped it.

He paused and took a fleetingly nervous glance around, then looked at me and continued. 'One day I was so unhappy she came home and I drank poison in front of her.' Having drunk the poison in a fit of rage, he was rushed to the clinic, but fortunately he had taken a small dose. However, the attempt had shown his wife that he had reached his limit; he was capable and ready to go the extra mile to challenge her control over him. 'After that she never call her brother again; I started drinking with her brother – I told her you do what you want and I do what I want.'

Ingestion of agrochemicals, especially pesticides, is the most common method of suicide and self-harm in Sri Lanka (Eddleston et. al 1998; Gunnell et. al. 2007; Widger 2014, 2015(a)(b)). The experience of ingesting agrochemicals has been described to me by survivors as one of searing pain, like 'fire from inside'. Jonathan Spencer (1990a) in his monograph *A Sinhala Village in a Time of Trouble* notes that

> The suicide usually follows a minor domestic dispute – the father or mother refuses to give the son or daughter money to go to the cinema, a husband complains to his young wife about his meal. The victim goes out and buys weedkiller, drinks it, then presents the family with the consequences; the poison used in almost all of these cases is well known for its slow and agonizing effects – effects which the mother, father, or husband then has to watch in horror (Spencer 1990a: 186).

Spencer goes on to comment that the priest in his village of *Tenna* was convinced that the majority of such suicides were aimed at causing pain to those closest to the victim. My own observations over the years seem to confirm the latter. Throughout my fieldwork from January 2012 to July 2013 I recorded 23 suicides in and around the villages of Po and Thomale (8 of which were a result of ingestion of agrochemicals), and many more acts of self-harm, most of which were caused by ingestion of agrochemicals, household chemicals like bleach, or paracetamol. In earlier chapters I have argued, following on Janet Carsten (2000) and Marshall Sahlins (2011), that the regular consumption of food and alcohol between people is in itself an expression of kinship. My own contention in light of the latter, is that Sri Lankans opting to ingest 'poison' following a dispute with close kin is a way of indicating that the relationship is a toxic one (cf. Widger 2015). This may be extended to the example cited at the beginning of this chapter, involving Podi. Podi's relationship with individuals and families in Po was based on brotherhood, and was expressed through regular socialisation and the collective consumption of alcohol. The decay of Podi's relations with his network in Po led him to drink excessively. *Arrack*, which was initially the medium through which his kinship with Po individuals was expressed became the same substance that was used to express the toxicity of these same relationships. Podi expected that his friends in Po would fulfil their obligations of support and attend his *thovil*, but this did not happen. In Sunil's case, his wife's control over him and her refusal to allow him to socialise with other men led him to ingest poison. Sunil rejects his relationship with his wife and this is expressed through his ingestion of agrochemicals. It would seem that Sunil regards his relationship with his wife as a toxic one that killed off the relationships he had nurtured with other men over the years. His reaction after his act of self-harm was to begin drinking

with his friends again, including his wife's brother Toni. Thus, suicide and self-harm are also ways for people in Sri Lanka to outline desired relations.

Belonging together or torn apart

As I have alluded to earlier in this chapter, suicide or the threat of self-harm serves as a form of protest, and imbues the self-harmers with social agency, in a situation where every other path for them has been shut off. The body is the only available tool left to them, a scroll on which to engrave their grievances and their stories. Karin Andriolo (2006: 103-104) notes that in most cases of protest suicide the public will gladly accept allusions to mental illness, or emotional turmoil as the root causes of suicide, to avoid dealing with the wider and unsettling implications being imparted and communicated through protest suicide; the public reaction in Sri Lanka differs. James Staples and Tom Widger (2012) stress that suicide can generally be understood as a form of social relationship, 'a vehicle by which people do not simply threaten or end their own lives but come to understand their own lives, and the world around them' (Staples and Widger 2012: 186). Likewise, suicides can become a medium through which communal and individual concerns are voiced and exchanged. The case of the train suicide was the second such case in the area in two years. In the first train suicide which also involved a young couple where the girl was pregnant (Said 2014), the disapproval of the parents was motivated by caste differences between the two families, at a time when caste played a more prominent role in marriage choices. The brutality of the suicide motivated community members to discourage marriage arrangements on the basis of caste. Since the second train suicide, families in the communities involved have in fact become less intrusive in their children's selection of spouses (Said 2014).

Dorothy Counts (1980) records a similar situation in her fieldsite in Papua New Guinea. She relates the story of a young woman who committed suicide after having been courted and then rejected by her suitor. The threat of another similar suicide taking place motivated locals to take steps to prevent a repetition of the same circumstances that led to the tragedy. It is in this way that suicides become 'expressions of social relationships' (Counts 1980: 337). People assess what their desired relationships are and such extreme acts of individual expression also lead community members to identify what they see as 'good' and 'bad' relationships. In cases of suicides, community members would have been accustomed to the victims prior to the event, and would have formed their own relationships with them; they are similar in their upbringing, they know the same people, they share the same places and memories of those places – in other words they belong together. As Andriolo

(2006) states, 'Different from guilt, shame needs a public to become all consuming and inescapable' (Andriolo 2006: 108). The latter may also be applied to the case of Podi's *thovil* where it is understood by those attending that Podi's supposed friends in Po have acted badly with him. This is evidenced by Subha stating that they will drink and enjoy their time together, and in the process forget about the people from Po. In other words, the families from Po do not belong with them. Thus, the *thovil* connects people and re-establishes the bonds of community, who belongs and who doesn't. In the case of self-harm, the act seems to be widely used to outline inequality and some injustice in close kin relations. The relationship is toxic and needs to be cleaned, whilst premeditated suicide seems to be a statement that relations with close kin are irreparable and through the act of suicide the victim is stating that they do not belong with their family. Through death they will forever be disunited and they leave their family to deal with the shame and the guilt.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

When I first set foot in southern Sri Lanka in November 2005, it had been almost a year since the disaster had struck. The beaches along the southern coast still bore the signs of the destruction and in the villages, mounds of leftover debris eventually became overgrown with vines and weeds and blended into and became part of the land. The memory of the tsunami was also firmly etched in the land and its people. The stories of recovery in the villages of Po and Thomale were characterised by change and continuity and, the continuity of change. In chapter 2 I devoted considerable space to describing my own experience of coastal southern Sri Lanka and the disaster aftermath. The tsunami destruction that had coloured my initial image of Sri Lanka became less apparent with time and faded into the background as I turned my attention to the everyday. Eventually, I came to realise that the tsunami hadn't been lost in memory; it had simply synchronized with the rhythm of routine life. Imposing homes and business establishments concealed the scars in the land and new relationships replaced old ones. Villagers continually spoke to the change taking place around them whether by means of narratives of *prēta*, interactions with foreigners or through development of land and property. Some villagers (particularly in Thomale) chose to ignore the changes taking place around them and drew on previous patterns of behaviour. Villagers' normalisation of change has been a central theme of this thesis, in a bid to identify how coastal villagers respond differently to disruption and how they attempt to control the changes taking place.

In this thesis I have been especially concerned with the everyday lives of coastal Sinhalese in the aftermath of the Asian tsunami of 2004. I have shown how places are animated by the people that inhabit them and it is their varied relationships to place that have given shape to the narratives and conflicts that make up this thesis. How does place and specific experiences of place affect one's relationship to it? In this regard, Susanna Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (1999) suggest that

> Disasters often expose to both insiders and outsiders conditions that need alterations. Whether such changes are realized or not enters the inquiry. Undeniably, the introduction of change versus the retention of the former state of affairs sparks contention among the many disaster parties and factions (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 1999: 10).

Hoffman and Oliver-Smith argue that the conditions in the aftermaths of disasters facilitate and even encourage social change and conversely, the people affected also attempt to 'reassert prior patterns' of behaviour. As I have shown in chapters 2 and 3, the tsunami revealed the dangers of living along the coast, the response to which was for the government to establish a no build buffer-

zone. Villagers soon realised that their greatest impediment to rebuilding their lives was the sudden outside interest in coastal land. The buffer zone served, it seems, to buffer lucrative investment opportunities in coastal land from the meddlesome claims of coastal communities. A British expat had observed,

> It's like the early morning drive up to Colombo. Vehicles leave a trail of roadkill; the drivers can't see that far in the dark, but by the time the sun comes up the crows would have already pecked the road clean. That's how I see the tsunami – the wave was like a car mowing down everything in its path, the government and agencies were like the crows – they just finished the job.

The tsunami displaced people; it dislodged them from their homes, their families and friends. It altered their sense of place. Villagers often spoke to me of the haunting memories of death and destruction that possessed pockets of land, roads and buildings around the village (Chapters 5 and 7). Some people altered their daily routes to avoid places that held bad memories for them (see example with Hamzi in Chapter 5), others found that their normal routes were blocked off by concrete walls enclosing luxury homes. Thus, the ripple effects of the disaster – the aftermath – continued to alter the experience of village life. Over the years villagers shared stories of people that had died or had moved or were forced to move. They also spoke of those people that had moved into the village and the confrontations that ensued, as well as the friendships that blossomed. All of the latter conversations formed part of a continual narrative of recovery – an attempt at establishing continuity through the routinization of the transformations taking place. As Edward Simpson noted, 'The ordinary is not the mundane, for through routine acts there is a healing and the ability to tame great events' (Simpson 2013: 12). Routine and memory worked in tandem, allowing villagers to retrace their steps and redraw the boundaries of their community.

Routine was an important part of my fieldwork in the way it allowed me to get a sense of the unexceptional and highlighted the exceptional. The central argument of this thesis is that a critical event led villagers to accommodate all sorts of new relations with others and, these relations in turn shaped their sense of place. I have argued (chapter 5) that the tensions and conflicts that inform this thesis are indicative of the process of deterritorialization (Appadurai 1990) that the tsunami aftermath helped accelerate, allowing multiple epistemologies of place to collide. NGOs, Sinhalese from other localities, tourists, foreign expats, villagers and graduate students all congregated in the coastal localities and contributed in one way or another to change. How people imagined 'others' and how they imagined the places they occupied determined the course of everyday life in the villages of Po and Thomale. What I have shown in this thesis are the trajectories of gradual change to

the lives of ordinary people in two coastal communities after the tsunami. Another scope of this thesis has been to give its protagonists the opportunity to tell their stories of recovery, or at least parts of them.

I started off this thesis with the words of Sampath, a fisherman: 'we have had tsunami here for thirty years, but only now foreigners come' (See Chapter 1). Sampath now lives in Trincomalee on the North-East coast of Sri Lanka. After the disaster he had spent over two years battling with government officials and NGO personnel in a bid to get them to recognise his claim to ownership of a small plot of coastal land. His claim had been denied. He had argued that all his documents had been lost in the wave. He said his friends, family and neighbours could testify to his ownership of the land. He had been told by government officials that his name did not feature in the land registry and due to the number of false claims they were receiving at that time, they could not help him. For over two years Sampath waited; he slept in a shack he had put together using rotting planks of wood and aluminium sheeting. When the heavy monsoon rains came, his makeshift home flooded and he sometimes came to my home to sleep on a mat on the floor. Sampath had also approached numerous NGOs with requests to help him build a two-roomed house. None had accepted and all the while Sampath had to watch as others around him received help, some of whom had not even been affected by the disaster.

Finally, one month before I left Sri Lanka Sampath announced that he would be moving to Trincomalee the following year to reunite with his then estranged wife, who had been living in Trincomalee since the tsunami. When I asked him whether he had given up on getting his land back, he said 'government people say my name not there (in the registry), no one help – so now I leave. Maybe, with Tamils better'. The latter would have been considered a risky statement at the time given the ethnic tensions between Sinhalese and Tamils and the overwhelmingly anti-Tamil sentiment in the area. Sampath's statement was reflective of his frustrations with the state and the architecture of aid. At the time, the North and East of the island were still considered by southerners to be spaces outside of the nation and beyond government control, only they weren't. The majority Tamil areas in the North and East were an inseparable feature in discourses concerning national identity and nation building, especially when determining who belonged and who didn't. Sampath's home had been destroyed by the tsunami and after that the government had denied him ownership of his own land. He had been twice-displaced: once by the tsunami and once by the government. Sampath's comment - that maybe life among Tamils would be better - was his way of saying that he felt he didn't belong and that maybe he would have better luck among people who, in his view, also didn't belong.

In the aftermath of the tsunami many of the people I talked to felt excluded; they felt excluded from decisions that concerned them and from their own villages that were suddenly overrun by outsiders and teeming with unfamiliar faces. In chapter 4 I defined community as 'a sense of belonging together' and many of the interactions I observed over the course of my fieldwork were exercises in community building – i.e. determining who belonged and who didn't. In Po villagers were faced with a rapidly changing social landscape that centred around the control of land. Villagers were pitched against foreigners and affluent Sinhalese who had considerable capital to invest in the purchase of land and development of property. In chapter 3 I detailed how foreigners intent on developing property in Po entered into partnerships with local brokers to avoid paying a hundred percent tax on the value of the property and land. Families in Po who were already involved in the tourist industry were able to utilise their previous connections and experience to broker deals with foreigners over the purchase of land and in this way retain some control over land use in their village. This was made further evident to me when towards the end of 2012 Lasantha informed me that the government would be changing the law to prevent foreigners from purchasing more land in Sri Lanka. He said,

> The government they do like us now. They know that foreigners buying the land with our help so now they change the law. The politicians see the foreign houses and beach land and they want them. They change the law and now it easier for them to take the land.

Lasantha's comment had indicated to me the level of long-term strategy that had gone into his choices of partnerships and friendships with outsiders. Through the brokerage of property and land deals, his family had also secured employment for friends and other villagers in the construction of foreign-owned properties. They had nurtured a network of patron-client relations that had even extended beyond their village. In the process they had also created new relations with outsiders that were even expressed using a kin idiom (chapters 4, 5 and 6). These latter foreigners engaged in acts of reciprocity and regular gift-giving with their village friends and even acted as character references for the brokerage of further deals with other foreigners. With some foreigners only a bond of mutual interest existed, where both parties simply protected the other's interests and catered to each other's egos (chapter 6).

In Chapter 4 I engaged with some of the most notable works on kinship and land tenure in Sri Lanka. These works (Brow 1996; Leach 1965; Moore 1981; Obeyesekere 1967; Robinson 1975; Stirrat 1977; Tambiah 1973; Yalman 1965) have shed some light with regards to the flexibility of notions of relatedness and land ownership across different parts of the island at different periods of time. Sri Lanka has suffered major social and political upheavals in its recent history and the people affected managed to re-organise their lives and adapted to the changes that took place. They coped as they

had always coped (Chapter 1). These early works on kinship suggested that people who were likely to face adversity at some point in the course of their lives were more likely to organise themselves into tightly-knit groups who shared in each other's good fortune, as well as each other's hardships. Leach (1965) and Obeyesekere's (1967) description of the *vāsagama* is indicative of the latter. Shared assets and shared labour in this case indicated membership in the community – land in the village was an indication of belonging. I have shown that a similar organisation existed in the tsunami aftermath. In Thomale this was achieved through shared employment on Toni's boats, whereas in Po this was achieved through the organised brokering of land and development of property for foreigners.

However, in Po competition over land ownership had also pitched families and friends against each other and led to the formation of competing factions, whereas in Thomale the increased co-operation had further solidified kin relations. I have emphasised in chapter 4 that my understanding of kinship in this context follows on Sahlin's (2011) definition – that kinship is a 'mutuality of being'. But this raises the question of what is the difference between kinship and community, if one is defined in terms of a mutuality of being and the other in terms of belonging together? In chapter 4 I illustrated how men referred to other men utilising a kin idiom, even when no blood or affinal relation existed. In doing so men expressed their desired relations but also fulfilled obligations that were deemed to be part and parcel of such relations: reciprocity and, social and financial support. Although Lasantha utilised a kin idiom to refer to Lucien, this usage was also flexible. In the company of close friends Lasantha referred to Lucien as his *massinā*, in front of police as his friend [*yaluwa*] and in his absence as 'the Belgian foreigner'. Conversely, Chaminda or Dhammika were referred to by Lasantha as *massinā* irrespective of the company or situation they were in. Lasantha was very fond of Lucien but, he was also aware of the vast gulf that separated them and was often careful about the information he shared with him. Kinship between foreigners and Sinhalese was problematic. A mutuality of being implies just that: mutual realities and a shared experience of life. Community between foreigners and Sinhalese appeared less problematic.

Community as a sense of belonging together draws a line between relations that may fall outside the ambit of kinship. Although co-operation between villagers in Po was not as pronounced as it was in Thomale, villagers expanded their social networks by accommodating new relationships with outsiders. These kinds of relationships afforded villagers more opportunities for the pursuit of individual interests. The use of temporarily vacant foreign properties for socialisation and business allowed Lasantha and other men to hide their activities from the scrutiny of the rest of the village. Between some foreign expats and villagers there was a sense of belonging together, partly because

they felt they didn't fully belong elsewhere. Some villagers replicated European home designs and dreamt of visiting other countries while some foreign expats attempted to create a sense of belonging that included particularities of the native 'other'.

Although villagers in Po had adapted to the changes in the aftermath and had nurtured close relations with some expats, the presence of others troubled them. In chapter 7 I elucidated how the *bahiravā puja* was utilised as an expression of community where villagers collectively determined who belonged to the village and who didn't by using narratives of *prēta* to outline disruptive qualities in others. Although many villagers in Po had benefited positively from post-tsunami development, redefining access to land and recreating a sense of community remained issues of concern to them. The *bahiravā puja* drew on collective memories of people and place and confronted them with contemporary issues and changes. In this way, notions of community pre-tsunami speak to notions of community post-tsunami. Similarly, in chapter 8 I illustrated how the *thovil* in Thomale was also utilised as an expression of community and changing social relations. Through the ritual and the social activities that accompany it community boundaries are re-drawn.

In this thesis the question I set out to explore concerned how people cope with disruptive changes to their lives, firstly because I initially formed part of that disruption and, more significantly, because I wanted to understand how two communities in close proximity could have such diverging experiences of recovery. My personal experience of witnessing Po and Thomale change over the years has informed much of what has been written here. I have peppered these pages with select narratives and descriptions that represent fragments of the long road to recovery. Recovery is divisive and, in the aftermath, people choose what to carry with them and what to leave behind. In July 2013 I was on the train to Colombo – I was leaving Sri Lanka and the field the following day. As I sat in the train my mind went to everything I was leaving behind. I remembered the winding paths in the villages, between concrete, jungle and sea. I wondered about the future and what it would carry on and, what would it would leave behind, to wallow in memory and become part of an imagined past.

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